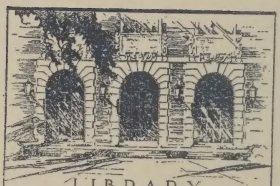

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THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERVIEW

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF THE INTERVIEW

by

R. C. OLDFIELD
Lecturer in Psychology,
University of Oxford

With a foreword by the late

C. S. MYERS
C.B.E., F.R.S.

THIRD EDITION

METHUEN & CO. LTD., LONDON
36 *Essex Street, Strand, W.C.2*

First Published . . . *April 3rd*, 1941
Second Edition . . . *October*, 1943
Third Edition . . . 1947

CATALOGUE No. 3702/U

PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

150.13
G21p
1947

TO

ALL THE INTERVIEWERS

WHO SO GENEROUSLY ALLOWED ME

TO INTERVIEW THEM

Labor + Indus. Rel. 21 Oct 49 Meeting 1997 · 5N99 Marshall

Sir Orpheus. Yes: that is a very fine attitude and quite a correct one. But have you nothing better to propose than an attitude?

Bombardone. Has anyone anything better to propose than an attitude?

SHAW. *Geneva*, Act 3.

FOREWORD

By DR. C. S. MYERS

IN 1937, a Research Studentship was generously allocated for three years to the National Institute of Industrial Psychology by the trustees of the late Viscount Leverhulme's benefactions. The author of this book was the first to hold this Leverhulme Studentship—for fifteen months. The important subject on which he proposed to undertake research was "the form of the interview best suited for the assessment of personal qualities". But he came to interpret this title on very liberal lines.

At the time of his appointment, Mr. Oldfield was assisting in an experimental investigation of the interview which was being conducted under the direction of Professor F. C. Bartlett at the Cambridge Psychological Laboratory. This research he completed during his tenure of the Leverhulme Studentship. He also carried out in Cambridge under my supervision an interesting experiment in which 'board' interviews and 'single' interviews were compared. I wish to thank Professor Bartlett not only for the hospitality of his Laboratory, but also for much other valuable assistance during the conduct of the experimental portion of Mr. Oldfield's work. Both in the initial planning of his researches and subsequently, I was also assisted by a small Committee in London consisting of Professors F. Aveling and Cyril Burt, Dr. C. A. Mace and Mrs. W. Raphael, whose helpful advice I acknowledge most gratefully.

This book does not give the specific results of the experiments just mentioned: they will be published separately. But it has profited by the experience gained by its author during his conduct of them. It is concerned especially with the earlier, *non*-experimental, part of Mr. Oldfield's work which was carried out mainly in London. This began with an observational study of actual interviews conducted by several large industrial organisations, by the Fighting Services and by other Government and Municipal Departments in the normal course of engaging their staffs, and by physicians who employ the interview for therapeutic and for selective purposes. I desire here to express my warm thanks to the Heads of these organisations and Departments and to others concerned, for giving Mr. Oldfield the rarely accorded permission to witness these interviews.

This study was followed by visits to persons having had considerable experience in interviewing, whom Mr. Oldfield interrogated regarding their views on the best working conditions of the interview and their methods, whereby the 'candidate' (as he may be broadly termed) is induced to display the most trustworthy clues, and his personal qualities are most accurately assessed. Finally, Mr. Oldfield issued a questionnaire to various psychologists throughout the country on the meaning which they attached to two particular words denoting personal qualities; the results of this inquiry have been already published.

Psychologically we know very little about what goes on in the interview; and there can be no doubt that Mr. Oldfield's thoughtful and systematic analysis has added considerably to this small knowledge. Realising through his

empirical and qualitative studies that the relations between interviewer and candidate are far too subtle and too fluid to be formulated in any simple statement of procedure, he reaches the conclusion that improvements in the interview are to be sought not by a rigid standardisation of technique, but by the attempt to discover the nature of, and the conditions affecting, the chief mental processes that are at work.

The book centres around the modern psychological term 'attitude', to which Mr. Oldfield has given a deservedly wide significance. He regards the *attitudes* displayed by the candidate as providing the essential basis of the interviewer's judgment of his personal qualities. In the creation of conditions favourable for the display of attitudes and in the actual production of these attitudes, the chief instrument in the hands of the interviewer is conversation. And conversation itself, according to Mr. Oldfield, consists fundamentally in an inter-action of attitudes, not, as is generally believed, in an exchange of information or ideas. Mr. Oldfield wisely stresses the value of skilled 'intuitive' acts, as contrasted with strictly 'scientific' procedures, in the perception of attitudes. And similarly he contrasts the 'psychological' with the 'logical' approach to the ultimate problem of the judgment of personal qualities. He traces the growth and definition of the schematic picture of the candidate's personality in the mind of the interviewer. Finally, he considers the advantages and the disadvantages of the 'board' interview.

The primary object of this book is to arouse in the skilled interviewer a spirit of psychological inquiry. Its secondary and closely associated objects are to translate into practically useful recommendations certain more or less abstract con-

clusions that have emerged from the author's analysis and investigations; to provide the interviewer with various hints on the conduct of the interview largely gathered from experienced interviewers; and to indicate future lines of experimental research. Thus it should help alike the intelligent interviewer and the psychological experimenter, who may desire information about the general psychology of the interview and suggestions for practical and experimental procedure. Admittedly, it deals particularly with that type of interview which is concerned with the assessment of qualities of personality. But the problems which it discusses are common to most other types of interview—though of little relevance to such a type as the newspaper interview. The reader who is unaccustomed to psychological discussions may find the second chapter difficult. I would suggest that he substitutes for this the last chapter—on conclusions, and that he defers reading the earlier chapter until he has finished the rest of the book.

CHARLES S. MYERS

NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF INDUSTRIAL PSYCHOLOGY
LONDON, W.C.2

September 1940

PREFACE

I WOULD like most gratefully to thank Dr. C. S. Myers, who constantly acted as foster-parent to this little book during the times when its author felt tempted to abandon it. Had it not been for his kindly persistence and generous help it is unlikely the book would have been written, and certain that it would never have been published. He has taken much trouble. I can only wish that the final result were worthier of his interest.

If there lurks behind these pages any consistent attitude towards psychological problems in general, I have to thank Professor F. C. Bartlett chiefly for this. Of other intellectual debts by far the greatest is to the writings of the late Sir Henry Head. It is to be hoped that he felt able to countenance the uses to which psychologists have put the ideas he first expounded so genially in a purely neurological context. Among friends at the Cambridge Psychological Laboratory I must thank especially Miss Margot Harvey and Mr. Oliver Zangwill.

Perhaps one of the most difficult tasks that a skilled person can be called upon to perform is the explanation of his skill to one who has little knowledge or experience of it. A number of interviewers tried to do this for me, and patiently answered my questions. They are too numerous for individual thanks; perhaps they will accept instead whatever fresh ideas about the exercise of their art this book may suggest.

The Leverhulme Trustees I have to thank for the grant of a Studentship in Industrial Psychology which made the work upon which this book is based possible.

My wife's part needs no mention. If I have failed to

dedicate the book to her, I hope she will bear in mind Schubert's reply to the young lady who reproached him with a similar offence: "*Wozu denn?—Ihnen ist alles ohnehin gewidmet!*"

R. C. O.

OXFORD
August 1940

PREFACE TO THE THIRD EDITION

SINCE THIS BOOK first appeared, I have had no deeper concern with the technique of interviewing than fell incidentally to the lot of many others in the course of their war-time occupations. The main text has, therefore, been left unaltered, but a short supplementary chapter has been added, drawing attention to some of the lines of practice and enquiry which have developed during the war.

I have to thank the Director-General of Medical Services, Royal Air Force, for permission to refer to work contained in Reports of the Flying Personnel Research Committee.

R. C. O.

CAMBRIDGE
July 1946

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTORY

§ 1

The necessity for judgments of personal qualities

IN THE course of our daily life we constantly make judgments about the personal characteristics of our fellow-beings. Sometimes these judgments are explicit—they become formulated in spoken or written language. But more frequently they remain implicit—they manifest themselves only in tendencies of behaviour, in attitudes towards the people concerned; nevertheless they can be expressed when occasion demands. Some of these judgments are true, in the sense that predictions are borne out and expectations not disappointed. Others, again, are false. But explicit or implicit, true or false, they are of great importance to our social existence. It must be admitted that the uniformities created by convention, law, education and other features of the social organisation within which we live often relieve us of the necessity of taking into account the individual peculiarities of those with whom we have to deal. But these uniformities serve also to provide a background against which individual differences are displayed, and become our concern.

This reckoning with people *as individuals*, as objects whose behaviour is not predictable solely in terms of rules generally applicable to their fellows, is, as I have said, largely unwitting, spontaneous and implicit. In general we make judgments about them only in the sense that knowledge about them and encounters with them leave their mark upon our

behaviour and our attitudes towards them. But the formalised structure of modern life often demands that we make judgments about people's personal qualities deliberately, upon a particular occasion, and with a particular purpose in view. And when an assessor is acting for another person, his judgment must be formulated and expressed in terms suited to its communication.

It is true that very often the primary decision to be made is not about an individual's personal qualities, but about his suitability for employment in a particular post. In such a case the assessment of personal qualities, although involved, may be implicit only, and never receive expression.

§ 2

The problem of assessing personal qualities

This, then, is the problem with which many are constantly faced:—how, without previous acquaintance, upon a particular occasion, and within a limited period of time, to arrive at a reliable assessment of the personal qualities of an individual. Broadly speaking, three solutions to this problem present themselves. First, we may obtain the required information from others in a position to supply it. Secondly, we may employ any scientific means available for the assessment of the qualities in question. Thirdly, we may arrange a personal meeting with the individual, and upon this basis arrive at an estimate of his qualities.

The first of these means is indeed widely employed, but has inevitable limitations. It may often be impossible to establish contact with people who possess the required information, or they may, for one reason or another, lack impartiality. So far as testimonials are concerned, dealings in them have become so conventionalised that they must often be regarded as meaningless formalities. Lastly, many people

have more faith in their own than in others' power of estimating character. In any case, they are apt to feel that when some contract is to be entered into which affects them personally, or in regard to which they have some responsibility to others, their own judgment of persons is of more use to them in making a practical decision.

Hopes have often been expressed that the development of a reliable science of human nature must ultimately provide the means of determining *by tests* the basic qualities of character and temperament which distinguish individual personalities. Attempts have even been made to apply to practical affairs some of the tests and theories which have already been devised. It is not my intention here to attempt any assessment of the value of these methods so far as they have at present developed.[1] It is sufficient to notice, what even the most ardent advocate of these methods will scarcely deny, that they are not yet so refined or accurate as to render the method of personal encounter redundant.[2] Even if they were, in so far as the *determination* of personal qualities is concerned, it would not follow that the interview is unnecessary for the purpose for which it is now used. The personal interview, like the clinical examination, is more than a mere inaccurate means of determining facts, employed *faute de mieux*. It serves also the necessary purpose of revealing these facts in their proper relationship, and of permitting conclusions to be drawn from them.

The third means of arriving at an estimate of the character and abilities of an individual within a limited period of time is the *interview*. The problem of how best to employ this

[1] For an account of these methods, and some assessment of their value see the excellent monograph of Dr. P. E. Vernon. "The Assessment of Psychological Qualities by Verbal Methods", *Industrial Health Research Board Report*, No. 83. 1938.

[2] Tests of special and general abilities, of course, stand upon a different level of usefulness and efficiency.

means is the subject of this book. Everybody has some more or less clear idea of what an interview is. But it will be as well, since we are to discuss it in some detail, to arrive at some definite statement of what we shall take to constitute the interview, and to differentiate it from other forms of human intercourse.

§ 3

What is an interview?

Social existence today is beset with interviews. The newspaper interview seems to have provided the origin of the modern use of the word. But besides the journalist, we find the social investigator, the anthropologist, the police officer, and many others using the interview *as a means of collecting information*. In the second place, interviews may be employed for the *making of arrangements*, whether these concern the destiny of nations or the repair of a drainage system: the value of personal contact for such purposes is widely advocated. Thirdly, the *selection and rejection of applicants for employment* is almost invariably carried out by a process which includes an interview. Other uses of the interview are to be found in the *assessment of intellectual and temperamental qualities*, in *medical diagnosis and treatment*, and in the *adjustment of grievances and difficulties*. In all these and in many other activities indispensable to modern life, the interview in one form or another plays a part, frequently a most important one.

What is it, then, that is specially characteristic of the interview itself, marking it off from other forms of human intercourse, and from other means employed in the fulfilment of the purposes we have mentioned? The *Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* tells us that the interview is "a meeting of persons face to face, especially for the purpose of formal

conference on some point"; and it will probably be agreed that nothing would be an interview which did not involve a meeting of individuals face to face. It is true that the word may sometimes be applied to exchanges of talk over the telephone; but such an application ought perhaps to be treated as a special extension of meaning. The interview, then, implies the actual physical proximity of two or more persons, and in general it requires that all the normal channels of communication shall be open to their use. They must be able to see one another, hear one another's voices, understand one another's language,[1] and generally make use of all that is psychologically inherent in physical proximity.

The dictionary definition makes mention of the *formal* nature of the occasion: the interview must be embarked upon with the consciousness that it is a meeting *arranged with the object of accomplishing some purpose.* There is an implicit assumption that interviewer and candidate do not commonly meet, at least in these capacities, and that, this being the case, the occasion is dedicated to a special purpose. A mere casual meeting without any purpose more specific than the enjoyment of conversation or the rehearsal of social convention is not an interview. (It is true, of course, that a meeting which is ostensibly casual may be utilised by one of the parties for some ulterior purpose not disclosed to the other. The latter is then sometimes said to be interviewed without his knowledge. Whether or not this is a justifiable sense of the word is a matter of taste. In any case, it is probable that there can never exist in either party a *full* consciousness of the other's purpose. But I wish to exclude from consideration the meeting in which deliberate deception is practised.) Again, the meeting together of two individuals

[1] The nature of interviews in which one or both of the persons is blind or deaf or in which an interpreter is necessary raises interesting psychological problems which cannot be discussed here.

with the object of transacting business, even though it be upon an occasion arranged for this purpose, is not an interview if these individuals *habitually* meet for the transaction of such business. If a colleague and I were to arrange that he should visit my room at a certain hour upon a certain day with the express object of settling the details of an experiment that we intend to conduct, this would not be said to be an interview. But it does not follow that a *mere* repetition of occasions, such as may be found in psycho-therapeutic procedure, progressively destroys the interview-like character of the meetings. Repetition of this kind will not, indeed, be without effect upon their character, but their status is maintained by other factors.

The interview proper makes use of *true conversation* and does not rely upon the mere oral exchange of information which might equally well have been conveyed by other means. If I go to the butcher to order some beef-steak, I cannot be said to interview him. But I might reasonably be said to do so if next day I seek him out with the express object of complaining that the beef-steak was tough. There is here a dynamic quality in conversation, with a flexibility in matters of detail, which is indispensable.

The interview generally, although not invariably, entails a non-reciprocal relation between the individuals concerned. One person desires to get information from another; the doctor diagnoses or treats the patient; the employment officer engages or rejects the applicant. *One party interviews the other.* Even where the purpose of the encounter does not involve a lack of reciprocality, the personal characteristics of those taking part, and the circumstances of the encounter, very often introduce one.

Four main characteristics, then, jointly mark off what we should ordinarily call an interview from other types of human encounter. It is a meeting of individuals face to face; it is

dedicated to a particular purpose, and is embarked upon with the consciousness of this; it employs true conversation; and there is frequently a non-reciprocal relation between the individuals taking part. From these characteristics arise many of the psychological peculiarities of the interview situation.

§ 4

Can interviewing be improved?

In the face of astonishing developments in the means of communication between individuals, the value of the interview—of "the meeting face to face"—has grown rather than diminished. The very structure of modern social life has become regulated, and indeed is now sometimes dominated, by merely indirect bonds of communication. As more and more of the business of life is conducted by correspondence formalised by long custom, so the individual himself becomes more remote and hedged in by the mechanical contrivances through which he is constrained to express, and by which he may conceal, himself. Forms of expression become conventional, sometimes deceptive, and so finally meaningless. And thus the value of the "face to face" encounter asserts itself by contrast with a background of uncommunicative correspondence, while at the same time the difficulties of its fruitful use increase. The interview is an exercise in the art of conducting human relations. Its value depends upon powers of expression and interpretation which have, now perhaps, become somewhat rusty by disuse.

The question, therefore, arises "What are these powers—how may they be increased and best used?" The present is an age of 'technique'—of time-saving, communicable, method. The interview is a procedure which consumes time, is often uncertain in its results, and the successful conduct of which seems to depend rather upon innate gifts and long

experience than upon the observance of formulated rules. Would it not be possible, by scientific investigation, to distil experience for the benefit of the learner, to determine and so eliminate the sources of uncertainty, and to ensure economy of procedure and so save time? Is it not desirable to develop a *technique* of interviewing, just as there is a technique of typewriting, of chemical analysis, and of accountancy? Some will answer this question more or less emphatically in the negative, feeling that any attempt on the part of science to invade the field of human relations is impracticable or horrible, or both. Others will hold this to be at once desirable and inherently possible. But we ought, perhaps, to reflect upon a certain ambiguity in the meaning of the word 'technique', or rather upon a distinction between 'technique' and '*a* technique'. On the one hand, in some connections the word carries with it the suggestion of a procedure which is susceptible of clear formulation, and which will enable anybody who grasps and follows its rules to effect a given purpose, even without an understanding of the underlying mechanisms. In this sense there is a technique of detecting faults in complex electrical circuits, and of staining and mounting microscopical specimens. The emphasis here lies upon the idea that a set of rules will enable a person to carry out a task even when he is in ignorance of its true nature. But in other connections the word 'technique' suggests acquaintance with basic principles which, although their application is not and could not be sufficient to achieve a given purpose, nevertheless must be observed. In this sense there is 'technique' in painting, in playing the piano, and in writing verse.

To the question whether it might be possible to devise a technique of the interview in the first of these senses, whereby ignorance might be discounted and indolence spared the pains of experience, the answer must be 'No'. The circumstances to be met are too variable and complex for any limited

set of rules to compass. And, as I shall try later to suggest, there are probably features indispensable to effective interviewing which lie beyond the conscious control of the interviewer. But on the other hand, it is reasonable to maintain that careful study of the interview, with due regard to its delicate phenomena and the destructive power of scientific method clumsily applied, may lead to some understanding of the psychological processes that are involved. If such fuller understanding could be itself assimilated within the individual minds of those who conduct interviews, it might assist them in the improvement of their art—an art which, whether deplorably ineffective or marvellously apt, can never be replaced by a strictly scientific procedure.

§ 5

The expression of judgments about personal qualities

I am not proposing to discuss interviews in general, but their use for a particular set of purposes, namely those which require the assessment of personal qualities. And I may reasonably be asked at the outset to try and give some answer to the question "What *are* personal qualities?" If this question be taken to mean "What basic, independent, qualities characterise individuals, and differentiate them one from another?", the answer must be an admission of ignorance, but not one which invalidates our inquiry.[1] For we possess an every-day, common-sense, idea of personal qualities, about which there is some measure of agreement. This agreement is in fact sufficient for it to be possible to make, communicate, and give practical effect to, judgments of these qualities. It is even sufficient to allow of cogent disagreement

[1] For an exhaustive review of this and other questions relating to Personality see Professor Gordon Allport's work *Personality: A Psychological Interpretation*. London: Constable. 1938.

about such judgments, and to recognise that errors in them may arise from inadequacies of interviewing procedure. It is therefore permissible to ask how the interview might be improved *within the commonly accepted system of ideas about personal qualities.*

What these commonly accepted ideas are it is not easy to formulate. Common-sense, challenged upon this point, might try, as a start, to employ a method often used in such cases—that of enumerating, or giving examples of, personal qualities. Thus we might say that they are qualities like 'reliability', 'honesty' or 'sociability'. In doing so, we are in effect offering specimens of the adjectives and adjectival substantives which stand for attributes of persons of the kind we have in mind. But this is not in itself very satisfactory, for there are about seventeen thousand such words in the English language. Many of these are archaic, or of literary significance only. And many are synonyms or antonyms of others. But when these have been discounted, we are still left with a formidable list. Are all the attributes for which these adjectives stand the personal qualities we want to indicate?

There are a number of reasons for thinking that this is not a good solution of the problem. To try to consider all these reasons would lead us into distant and possibly perilous regions of thought. But there is one consideration, which has to do with actual practice rather than with theory; and this is briefly as follows.—There is no doubt that the richness of our vocabulary for the description of persons in some way reflects our awareness of the extreme complexity and variability of human nature. But, in making judgments about persons which demand fine discrimination and precise characterisation we do not in fact make use of this multiplicity of available adjectives. It is indeed doubtful whether more than a couple of hundred are in common use. There is no *a priori* reason why a multiplicity of adjectives should not be

used for the registration of judgments in a field presenting such complex differentiation. And doubtless many of these adjectives have come into being in the effort to provide a language adequate to this complexity. But the fact remains that they are not used; and the chief reason is not difficult to find. This is that it proves impossible to maintain so great a number of separate terms in a state of precise, unambiguous, and universally recognised, significance.

If then we do not in fact draw upon the purely adjectival resources of our language, what means *do* we employ in the expression of such judgments? On looking at actual character sketches and verbally expressed judgments, it becomes plain that a number of different devices are used, none of them easy to define. Even the simplest character sketch is no mere collection of bald, adjectival attributions. An adjective may be used, but it is immediately limited in its effective context by means of a qualifying clause—as, for instance, in the phrase "he is reliable, in so far as his own affairs are concerned". Again, it is common to find the meaning of an adjective limited by an explicit reference to the precise sense in which it is intended. Thus we may say "he is reliable, not in the sense that he always fulfils obligations he has undertaken, but in the sense that he never causes other people to find their expectations disappointed. If he finds he cannot fulfil an obligation undertaken, he will take steps to inform the person to whom he is obliged".

A third device is to make use of a vivid concrete illustration so that far more is implied and conveyed than a mere judgment of probable behaviour in certain hypothetical concrete circumstances. If we say of someone that "he would take the coat from a beggar's back", we do not intend to attach special significance to this particular act, nor to assert that the subject of the remark would in fact perform it if he had the opportunity. We are simply trying to express the peculiar

quality and degree of his lack of moral sense and pity, and his disregard of social convention. If we succeed in accurately conveying this, the use of the remark will have been justified. Yet another resource of language often drawn upon consists in the use of words having emotional or ethical significance. Even gesture and expressive movement may, in conversation, be pressed into service to convey a tinge of meaning that words alone would fail to represent.

These are some of the many devices by which judgments about people are expressed and conveyed more fully and precisely than the use of attributive adjectives will allow. To describe these means as unscientific, uncontrolled and apt, by their dependence upon individual expression and interpretation, to be misleading and unreliable is doubtless justified. Nevertheless they are widely used in practice, and they serve to convey much information of practical importance which could not otherwise be communicated while our explicit knowledge of the structure of personality remains where it is, and a scientific terminology is lacking. In discussing the interview, we have to accept them, however deeply we may deplore them.

§ 6

The investigation of the interview

Lastly, I will briefly consider what means are available for the investigation of the interview as it is used for the assessment of personal qualities. Two circumstances in particular tend to thwart the immediate and direct application of a purely experimental method to our problem. The first consists in the *practical* importance of many of the problems of the interview. There is an inevitable tendency to choose for immediate attack those problems which are, or seem to be, of the greatest practical significance. There is, un-

fortunately, no evidence of a necessary connection between the practical, and the *scientific*, significance of a problem. Secondly, in attempting to deal with so complicated a phenomenon as the interview, great caution is necessary in the use of that essential of scientific procedure—the control of conditions. The danger of eliminating essential features in the effort to vary only one factor at a time must always be closely guarded against.

On the positive side, the main lines of procedure ought, I suggest, to be as follows. First, to apply *observational* methods to the study of *real* interviews, as far as possible undistorted by laboratory controlled conditions. Secondly, to try to analyse what is observed, in the effort to gain some *understanding* of what occurs, and of the whereabouts of problems susceptible of attack by experimental methods. Thirdly, to devise *experiments* to test hypotheses formulated as the result of observational study. These experiments will not necessarily be ones upon the interview itself. Lastly, to *scrutinise* carefully the *subsidiary* factors involved in character judgment, such as the linguistic and conceptual resources available for their formulation and communication.

All this, it may be said, amounts to no more than a rehearsal of what is ordinarily implied by scientific method as a whole. But what I wish particularly to urge is that the method be used *as a whole*, and *not* short-circuited in a vain effort to save time and headaches.

Chapter II

SOME ESSENTIALS OF THE INTERVIEW

§ 1

Two chief aspects of the interview: Stimulation and Cognition

IN THIS and the next chapter we shall consider theoretically the essential processes of the interview. Interviewer and candidate[1] meet; the former tries to assess the latter's personal qualities either in themselves or in relation to his suitability for a given post. There are limitations of time and circumstance, and his method is conversational.

The interviewer's judgment must be based upon something *displayed* by the candidate. The first question, then, we shall have to ask and try to answer, is "What is it that is displayed by the candidate and serves as a basis for assessing his personal qualities?" The answer I shall give, and try to justify, is that it is chiefly the *attitudes* displayed by the candidate that form the basis of the interviewer's judgment. It is the interviewer's task, by skilful conversation, to cause a number of attitudes to be displayed by the candidate. But these attitudes are dependent not only upon what the interviewer says and does, but also upon the whole situation of which he is but a part. The situation is, for a variety of reasons, more or less alarming to the candidate; and the relation of interviewer to candidate is almost inevitably one of superior to inferior. The result of both these factors is to

[1] For convenience I shall refer to the person interviewed as the candidate, in preference to the wider but even less pleasant term 'interviewee'.

tend to *fix* upon the candidate attitudes foreign to his normal personality. Unless this state can be dissolved, it is impossible, even for the most skilful conversationalist, to evoke attitudes sufficiently well-defined and natural to allow judgment to be based upon them.

The first main function of the interviewer—the first essential process of the interview—is the *stimulation* of the candidate. This falls into two parts, the creation of conditions favourable to the display of well-defined attitudes, and the actual production of these attitudes. In both of these tasks, the chief instrument at the disposal of the interviewer is *conversation*. It will be necessary, then, for us to consider what conversation is, and how it may be used for these purposes. The first of these questions I would like to try to answer more fully than by merely saying that conversation consists of alternate remarks by two or more individuals with a thread of unitary reference running through them. Such a statement offers no implications that enable us to explain how it is that some conversations can produce the most profound psychological effects.

But the interviewer's functions are not confined to the *stimulation* of attitudes. He has, in addition, to perceive these attitudes and to form a judgment upon the basis of what he perceives. These two activities go hand-in-hand, and in a later chapter I shall find it convenient to treat them together. I shall try to describe these processes of perception and judgment in such a way that the conditions favourable to their effective occurrence in the interview will be brought to light.

Lastly, although the discussion so far has tended to distinguish two main aspects of the interview, the stimulatory and the judgmental, it is important to notice that this distinction involves a process of abstraction which is ultimately invalid. The two phases cannot be *temporally* separated.

Throughout the whole course of the interview there is close interplay between the processes of stimulation and those of judgment, and at every stage each is dependent upon, and determined by, the other. The abstraction I have made was made only in the interests of analysis; but it lays an obligation upon us to consider the interview *as a whole*.

§ 2
Attitudes

The word '*attitude*', like many borrowed without adequate security by psychology from common usage, has come to possess a variety of special meanings. But in general it will, I think, be agreed that it involves two things. These are—first, an *experience* of a certain kind, and second, *activity* of a certain kind. It may, and probably does, involve other things beside these; but let us confine our attention to these two. When, for example, we say that a person displays a 'critical attitude', we mean that his experience is that of criticising, or has the quality of being critical, and that his *activity*, or reaction to the situation with which he is faced, is one of criticism. The names for attitudes, then, are the names for certain *kinds* of experience and for corresponding *kinds* of reaction.

It is often felt that, whereas behaviour can be directly perceived, attitudes and states of mind are known only by inference. As I do not wish to embark upon the discussion of questions which might be regarded as 'philosophical', I will remark about this only that we are concerned here with the directness of the *psychological* process that is involved in the apprehension of attitudes. I am concerned to emphasise that in a social encounter the apprehension of an attitude in general does not require an explicit conscious inference from perceived behavioural signs. Whether it is inferential in the

metaphysical sense that we cannot be immediately aware of other people's states of mind is another question, and one which does not concern us here.

We shall assume, then, that an attitude, regarded in its aspect of being a certain kind of activity, is immediately perceived and is not a matter of inference, although it may be subject to mis-perception, and may require a certain length of time for its perception. As regards the other aspect of the attitude—its *experiential* aspect, certain fields of psychological literature are full of references to attitudes as things which are 'experienced'; and in common talk we very often refer to attitudes as if their *essential* character, antecedent to any quality of *behaviour* associated with them, were to form part of the content of *consciousness*. It will be as well for us to avoid reference to this experiential aspect of the attitude, if possible, since as experiences they are very difficult to introspect and describe. Indeed, most of such introspective descriptions are vague in the extreme. They generally make reference to two features.—The first of these is that attitudes incorporate affective or emotional elements which are conspicuous for their pervasiveness and their lack of intensity. The second relates to the occurrence of feelings of incipient activity. Fortunately, neither of these two features is in general relevant to the assessment of personal qualities by interview. For, in the first place, they cannot be directly perceived; and in the second place, in assessing personal qualities we are generally interested less in what the individual *experiences* than in the manner in which he will *react* when faced with a given situation. Without denying the reality or the interest of attitudes *qua* 'experiences', it will, I think, be best if we leave this aspect of them out of account. Accordingly we shall treat attitudes as particular kinds of *activity*.

It is highly important, however, to make clear that in referring to *activity* we are speaking of the activity of the

whole organism, not only of outward movements, i.e. of overt physical behaviour. This is not inconsistent with the position that attitudes (in this aspect of them) are directly perceived. If a man is just sitting and thinking, preparing for visible behaviour, it will be very difficult to perceive what kind of activity he is engaged in,—that is what attitude he has taken up towards the subject of his thoughts. As soon, however, as he begins to speak or act, it becomes very much easier to perceive this. We must distinguish, then, between the proposition that the perception of an attitude *involves* external manifestations and the proposition that *all* that is perceived is a quality of these manifestations only.

So much for attitudes in themselves. For our present purposes they may be considered to be *kinds* of *activity—ways* in which the organism may *react* to situations, topics, and psychological material generally. But I must insist once again that the terms 'activity' and 'reaction' do not refer solely to the visible behaviour of the organism. There is a tendency to think of activity or reaction as co-extensive with outward, more obvious, behaviour, and to distinguish outward activity from preparation, or preparedness, for such activity. This tendency is, to my mind, pernicious and productive of a great deal of unfruitful dispute and false dichotomy. The organism may or may not react to a situation. To say that it does react is to say that it takes up an attitude. The reaction may, or may not, include outward behaviour; whether it does or not depends upon circumstances, but is independent of the nature of the reaction. In the measure in which outward behaviour does occur, it will be possible to apprehend by observation the nature of the reaction.

In general, every situation in which an organism is placed will evoke an attitude. I say 'in general' because the only exception would seem to be quasi-pathological in nature. It is possible for an actual suspension of activity to take place,

and no attitude to be taken up; this may occur in consequence of inhibition. This state is commonly found in those suffering from mental disorder of certain kinds. It is also found as a temporary phenomenon in normal people, in whom it appears as a defence against too free a manipulation of their attitudes by others. An instance is provided by the situation in which one person fears that he may be persuaded by another against his will to do something that he is unwilling to do. His remedy is to suspend his own activity, since it is more difficult for the other to *create* an attitude in him than to *alter* one attitude into another. This suspension of attitude is present in candidates at the outset of an interview; it must be dissolved by the interviewer.

Failing this abnormal condition, however, it is a general rule that every situation evokes an attitude in the organism. What attitude will be evoked is dependent upon a number of factors. Chief among these are, on the one hand, the nature of the situation, and on the other hand, the purposes or adaptive demands of the organism. Now it is plain that in any given situation certain types of activities, that is certain attitudes, are more in accord with the demands of the organism than others. In other words, they will, more readily than others, lead to the satisfaction of these demands. In this sense we may say that some attitudes are more *appropriate* to a situation than others. If the attitudes of an organism are habitually appropriate to the situations in which it finds itself, the organism may be said to have acquired control over its environment. It is organically in equilibrium with the environment, inasmuch as changes in the environment are compensated for by changes of organic activity, and the organism itself is preserved essentially unchanged. But at the same time, the organism can also be said to have acquired control over its own attitudes, since these are determined in accordance with its adaptive demands. If, on the other hand,

the attitudes of the organism are habitually *inappropriate*, this will mean that they are evoked by the environment without reference to the demands of the organism. And this is tantamount to saying that the organism has no control over its attitudes. This is the sense in which the phrase 'control over attitudes' will be used in the discussion that follows. (There is another sense in which a person may be said to exercise control over his attitude. It is possible to impose an attitude upon oneself, at least temporarily, by means of a deliberate act of will. Such an act may occur when an individual perceives that an attitude has been evoked in him which is inappropriate to the situation. The necessity for such acts in general indicates some failure of personal organisation.)

§ 3
Attitudes in the interview

We are now in a position to consider the part played by attitudes in a social encounter. If one person encounters another, the attitude which each displays constitutes an important element in the situation which faces the other. The attitude of each, then, evokes a change of attitude of the other. So we may say that the consequence of every encounter between two individuals is a re-adjustment of the attitudes of each. This *direct* interaction between attitudes lies close to the root of all social relations. In particular it constitutes the psychological basis of the interview, whatever its purpose.

The actual course taken by this interaction of attitudes will depend upon a number of factors. Among these are the purposes of the two parties, the circumstances of the encounter, and the degree of control which each party can exercise over his own attitudes. We cannot consider here all the possibilities implied in these factors. It is sufficient to notice that

in many encounters one party takes the initiative, either because he possesses more control over his own attitudes than the other (and/or can draw from the circumstances some initial advantage), or because the second party willingly allows him to do so. In either case, possessing the initiative, it is the business of this individual actively to manipulate the attitudes of the other, in such a way as to effect his purpose in the encounter. This purpose may be one of a number.—He may seek to induce a belief, to bring about a course of action, to re-adjust a personal difficulty, to assess personal qualities, or simply to indulge the brutal pleasure of 'winning an argument' (in other words, of reducing his opponent's control over his attitudes to *nil*).

This manipulation of the attitudes of one person by another is effected chiefly by two means. Primarily, perhaps, the direct interaction of attitudes is utilised, the interviewer (as we may perhaps now conveniently call him) displaying successive attitudes himself. In the second place, conversation allows him virtually to present situations for the candidate to react to. He can raise topics and observe the nature of the candidate's behaviour towards them. These are the principal manipulatory operations employed in the interview. We shall consider later some of the special tactics involved in their use. It is important, however, to notice here that for the most part they are used together, the same topic of conversation being employed for the display of attitudes by both candidate and interviewer.

Before considering how the display of attitudes by the candidate can be made the basis of an assessment of his personal qualities, there is one last point to be noticed in connection with the processes of manipulation. I have said that the interviewer 'manipulates' the candidate's attitudes, and I have suggested that the attitudes displayed by the candidate afford the basis of his assessment. The expression 'manipula-

tion', however, implies control in some sense; and it might appear, at first sight, that if the interviewer by manipulation produces or controls the attitudes of the candidate, these could scarcely provide any information about the candidate's personal qualities.

We must, however, distinguish two senses in which the interviewer can be said to manipulate the attitudes of the candidate. In the first place, manipulation may be employed actually to induce a specific attitude in the candidate. If this is done, the attitude itself is not a source of information since it has been imposed by the interviewer, although the fact that it has been possible for him to induce it may be. This is one object of attitude-manipulation in psychotherapy. It is found in its most clear-cut form in hypnosis. But, in the second place, the interviewer may be said to manipulate the candidate's attitudes inasmuch as, by displaying attitudes himself and by raising topics of conversation, he provides situations for the candidate to react to. He arouses attitudes in so far as he deliberately provides the occasion for certain attitudes to be displayed. And these attitudes, since they constitute the reaction of the candidate to that situation, do provide the basis of assessment. We may conveniently call this second kind of attitude-manipulation the *diagnostic* as opposed to the first, the *therapeutic*.

It is worth while to notice that a tendency in some people to allow these two to become confused in the interview is one of the commonly recognised dangers of its use for the assessment of personal qualities. The processes of attitude-manipulation in either case are less a matter of deliberate conscious intent than of the unwitting exercise of a skill. And the line which separates the process of provoking *some* attitude from that of inducing *a particular* attitude is narrow and easily overstepped. It is obvious that an assessment of the candidate based upon attitudes which have been induced

by the interviewer himself is valueless. Nevertheless, it is not uncommon.

To sum up my argument so far as it has proceeded, then, I start with the *attitude*. This I take to be a kind of activity evoked in an organism by the situation in which it is placed. Attitudes are directly displayed and are directly perceived. There is a direct reaction between the attitudes of two individuals in a social encounter, and frequently circumstances allow one of these individuals to take the initiative. By utilising the direct reaction of attitudes on the one hand, and the presentation of situations in conversation on the other, he may manipulate the attitudes of the other. Such manipulation may be directed either to diagnostic or to therapeutic ends.

§ 4

Attitudes and personal qualities

We have now to consider the attitudes displayed by the candidate in their aspect of providing the basis for the assessment of his character. Two questions arise here, one negative and the other positive. In regard to the first of these, while it might be widely conceded in a general way that the attitudes taken up by the candidate are among the important clues to his personal characteristics, it may at the same time be maintained that a number of other clues exist, and are in fact utilised by the interviewer. We shall therefore have to consider what these other clues are, and how far their use is really unconnected with the perception of attitudes. In regard to the second question, we shall have to inquire into the positive connection between attitudes and personal qualities.

So far as the first question is concerned, many people will probably maintain that the interviewer seeks not only to form some idea of the candidate's attitudinal reactions to a number of different topics, but also to get him to convey a certain

amount of information which is used in the assessment: not only the *manner*, but also the *matter*, of the candidate's remarks is relevant. This is evidently true in a sense. But we must ask *how* this information is extracted from the candidate, *what kind* of information is involved, and *what use* is made of the information when it has been acquired.

How, in general, do we obtain information from people? It is certainly not sufficient to ask a clearly framed question: this will not by itself ensure that we get a clear or truthful answer expressing the facts we seek. Much depends upon the attitude of the person from whom the information is sought. What he will reply is governed by his general attitude towards his questioner, the particular attitude of the latter displayed in asking the question, the attitude of the former towards the subject-matter of the question, his attentiveness and so forth. The fact that in every-day life we are constantly able to rely, in acquiring information, simply upon the asking of a question does not mean that the attitude of the person of whom it is asked is not of importance. It indicates rather that within our social community attitudes towards questioners are habitually suited to conveying information of certain kinds, even to strangers. But how closely this depends upon social factors becomes evident when the Londoner enters a remote village community and is disgusted to find that he cannot get "a plain answer to a plain question". He puts his failure down to the stupidity or suspicious nature of the inhabitants: whereas the more experienced traveller sets out, before asking his question, to induce an attitude which will ensure his obtaining an answer of the kind he needs. Now the interview provides an example of a situation in which attitudes are disturbed; and we cannot assume that they are suited to the accurate conveyance of information. Indeed it is plain to anyone who watches a number of interviews that often they are manifestly not. In answer, therefore, to the question of how

information is extracted from the candidate, we must acknowledge that the whole process of attitude-induction is involved.

We further asked what *kind* of information is generally sought in the interview, and what *use* is made of this information when it has been acquired. It is obvious, of course, that in an interview conducted for the purpose of selecting an employee, the practical decision will rest not only upon an estimate of the candidate's personal qualities proper, but also upon a number of other factors. His aptitudes, for instance, his experience, his place of residence, or whether he is married or single will or may have to be taken into account. And information about these factors may be sought in the interview. But as such information is not utilised in the assessment of qualities of personality, we may leave it out of consideration.

The information that is sought in the interests of assessment is, I think, mainly of two kinds. In the first place, there are certain facts about the candidate which, in conjunction with some general proposition, may be held to be directly evidential in relation to his personal qualities. Thus, for example, if it is discovered that the candidate was educated at a certain school, and if the interviewer has reason to believe that the majority of persons who hail from this school possess a keen sense of social responsibility, the conclusion, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, is that the candidate will be likely to possess this quality. In the second place, there is a certain type of factual information which, although it does not directly afford any conclusion regarding the personal qualities of the candidate, yet indicates his attitudes towards situations and topics in a symptomatic manner. If, for instance, detailed information is obtained from the candidate regarding events connected with some special aspect of his life, e.g. his Territorial service, some indication of his

attitude towards this aspect can be obtained. It is important to notice that this method of obtaining an indication of attitude is distinct from that in which a topic of conversation is raised in order that the candidate shall display his attitude towards that topic. In the method we are now considering, the candidate's attitude is not necessarily displayed in the *manner* in which he describes the events in question. It is deduced from the *factual* information about the events in question contained in the candidate's description. The factual information might just as well have been obtained from any person other than the candidate who was in a position to give it. Thus, for example, if the interviewer obtains reliable information to the effect that the candidate puts in extra time at his Territorial Headquarters helping the sergeant in charge of the office, this fact constitutes some indication of his attitude towards his Territorial service.

Now since this method depends upon the use of factual information, the question of the reliability and truthfulness of the candidate is at once introduced. And obviously the general rule to be followed is that the information sought, and the circumstances in which it is sought, must be such that the candidate will be likely to give a reliable and truthful account of the facts in question. In practice there are two principles used to increase the likelihood. The first is to seek information about matters which have no obvious or direct connection with accepted moral and conventional standards, or with the manifest purpose of the interview. The second is to insist upon a detailed coherent account of concrete events, and not to allow the candidate to gloss over gaps with statements of what he 'generally does' in given circumstances. Some interviewers find it helpful, if time allows, to obtain from the candidate a detailed account of how he spent the day before, or the previous week-end. Such a drastic procedure, however, may often only be permissible in the

psychiatric interview, where questions of 'prying' into the candidate's private affairs do not arise. But here again much depends on the capacity of the interviewer to induce suitable attitudes.

It must not be supposed, because this method of obtaining indications of attitude through factual information is distinct from that in which the candidate *directly* displays his attitude towards a topic raised in conversation, that the two methods are applied separately in the interview. A particular topic of conversation is raised—let us say the way in which the candidate spends his spare time. And the raising of this topic possesses at least three functions. In the first place, if it brings the candidate to speak of something in which he feels strong interest, it will induce in him a general attitude suited to his further stimulation and to his assessment. Secondly, the candidate may, in speaking of this subject, display his attitude towards it in well-defined and easily perceived form. Thirdly, the conversation may be led into matters of detail, whereby, from the information which the candidate gives, further light may be shed upon his attitudes.

We started this discussion with the question of the part which the acquisition of information, as opposed to the observation of attitudes, plays in the assessment of the candidate. Our conclusions are (1) that, whatever information of a factual nature is sought and to whatever use it may be put, the attitudes of the candidate are involved in its acquisition; and (2) that the information sought is of three kinds,—(*a*) that which is not utilised in the assessment of personal qualities but is relevant to other factors concerned in determining the candidate's suitability for selection, (*b*) that which is sought as a means of determining the candidate's attitudes in some significant connection, and (*c*) that which, in conjunction with some general proposition (as for example "most Boy Scouts are honest"), provides a direct indication of a

personal quality. We may say, then, that apart from this last type, the object of obtaining factual information in the interview, in so far as the assessment of personal qualities is concerned, is the exploration of the candidate's attitudes in significant connections, albeit indirectly. The third type of factual information mentioned, therefore, suggests the sole exception to our general principle that it is through indications of attitude that the interviewer arrives at an assessment of personal qualities. And I do not think that this exception need be treated very seriously. The intellectual procedure involved in this use of factual information forms less a part of the interview itself than an adjunct to it. It is one to be used with care and discretion.

I shall assume, then, that for the present purposes of discussion the task of the interviewer is to form an assessment of the personal qualities of the candidate chiefly by obtaining indications of his attitudes in significant connections. These indications are obtained by three methods—(*a*) by displaying attitudes himself, (*b*) by virtually presenting, in conversation, situations and topics for the candidate to react to, and (*c*) by obtaining from the candidate factual information from which his attitudes may be deduced.

We have yet to deal with the positive question (raised on page 23) of how attitudes are related to personal qualities. How is it that awareness of a person's attitudes leads to judgments being made about his personal characteristics? And, more particularly, what are the grounds for our general suggestion that the determination of attitudes forms a more adequate basis for such judgments than the mere observation of outward behaviour? We shall have to take as given the fact that pragmatically effective judgments of personal qualities are in fact made. And our justification must take the form of suggesting that the effectiveness of such judgments is dependent upon the determination of attitudes.

The following points may be raised in support of this contention.—

In the first place, I must emphasise yet again the status of attitudes as I have defined them. The attitude of an organism is the kind of activity it is engaged in as an organism. Its outward reactions are but a part of this activity. As we have conceived attitudes, then, their relation to outward behaviour is not that of internal cause to external effect, but that of whole to part. Consequently, if we attempt, as in the interview we do attempt, to assess the personal characteristics of an individual by observing his individual reactions, it is only reasonable to insist that the *whole* of his reaction should be taken account of; that is that attitudes and not outward reactions, should form the basis of assessment.

Secondly, attitudes are, psychologically, phenomena more consistent than are outward acts. There are at least three aspects of this consistency. Firstly, they are less subject to voluntary control than is outward behaviour. An individual may succeed, in a number of occasions, in performing *acts* or in giving expression to *ideas*, which are inconsistent both with his attitude and with his personal characteristics. And by doing so he may deceive a second person regarding his real qualities. But it is more difficult to simulate consistently an *attitude*. Secondly, attitudes are less diverse than acts. As a matter of experience, we are able more easily to predict what attitude an individual will take up in a given situation than what precise reaction he will make. It is reasonable to suppose, if an individual is found to be critical in relation to his school life, home life, the Government and his friends at the tennis club, that he will also tend to be critical of his working colleagues. In the third place, attitudes are more reliable in a *temporal* sense than particular modes of reaction. If an individual be placed in the same situation upon two occasions, his outward behaviour may be very

different; and this very change of outward reaction may be determined by the fact that the same attitude has prevailed.

It may perhaps be asked whether my repeated insistence upon the distinction between attitude and outward behaviour is not at bottom a matter of words, at least in so far as their significance for the interview is concerned. It may be objected, for instance, that no one, in forming a judgment of the personal qualities of another, ever does in fact take account only of specific reactions and of the literal meaning of what is said. And it might be held that outward behaviour is always treated, even if intuitively, as the clue to some inner state of mind. So much, we may agree, is true. But the important question is whether or not the interviewer is *aware* of his own procedure. He may in fact base his judgment upon the attitudes which he perceives in the candidate, while believing that his data consist of outward reactions. If such be the case, his attention will, in all probability, be unduly directed upon outward reactions and the particular statements made by the candidate—to the detriment of his apprehension of attitudes. If, on the other hand, the interviewer is aware of the importance of attitudes as a basis for assessment, his attention will more adequately be directed to the task of perceiving them and of provoking their display; and his conduct of the interview as a whole will be the more conducive to accurate judgment.

Let me now sum up very briefly what has been said in this somewhat abstract discussion. Our main line of argument has been to the effect that, in so far as it is possible at all at the present stage to formulate any basic principle governing procedure in the interview for the assessment of personal qualities, this is best expressed by saying that the task of the interviewer is to evoke the display of attitudes by the candidate, and to form his judgment upon his apprehension of

them. An attempt has been made to justify this suggestion by an appeal, on the one hand, to the fact that attitudes are directly apprehended and are not matters of inference, and, on the other hand, to their connection with the personal qualities of the candidate.

Chapter III

THE DISPLAY AND PERCEPTION OF ATTITUDES

§ 1

Conversation

PRIMA FACIE, all that occurs in the majority of interviews is that interviewer and candidate talk to one another. We shall be in a better position to understand the fundamental processes of the interview if we pause to consider briefly the nature of 'conversation'.

In general it takes two to make a conversation; and evidently it is a process in which something is exchanged between these two parties. On the face of it *remarks* are exchanged, and these remarks are in general meaningful and give expression to certain *ideas* entertained by the two parties. Moreover, the remarks are relevant to one another in meaning; and it is this continuity of reference which seems at first sight to confer unity upon a conversation and to distinguish it from a disjointed set of alternate utterances by two individuals. It is possible, however, to bring forward a number of considerations which cast some doubt upon the view that the essential *psychological* unity of a conversation derives from a continuity of reference and from meaningful connection between its parts. The chief of these considerations are the following.—

(1) Plainly much goes on in the course of a conversation over and above the mere exchange of ideas or information by verbal expression. At every stage the particular ideas

which are given expression, and the particular way in which they are expressed, are dependent upon factors other than the literal meaning of what has just been said. The speakers' attitudes towards the topic in question and towards one another are displayed and communicated, not only in the form of words employed, but also by gesture, tone of voice, inflection and so forth. These features seem to be essentially involved in the 'conversation', as opposed to an exchange of information which could as well have been carried out in writing. They can scarcely be regarded as mere adjuncts whose absence would not have abolished the conversational character of the exchange.

(2) The psychological effects of conversation cannot be explained in terms of the mere exchange of ideas verbally expressed. The effect of a conversation upon an individual is frequently to modify, at least temporarily, very much more than his intellectual beliefs concerning the topic of the conversation: a widespread change of attitudes is often the result. Similarly, in cases where an alteration of beliefs relating to the topic of the conversation occurs, this often seems to be less the result of the logical force of what has been said than of a change of attitude which has been brought about. The skilful conversationalist who seeks to alter the beliefs of another does not proceed by any bald marshalling of the evidence concerning these beliefs. His first task is to induce in his opponent an attitude favourable to the acceptance of the view he wishes to advocate,—or favourable, at least, to an impartial examination of the evidence and its implications. Indeed it is often striking how little the literal meaning and logical implications of what is *said* can be related to the psychological effects of a conversation.

(3) It is even less possible to trace any direct connection between the intellectual content of conversations and their social functions. It is plain that conversations possess many

different social functions. Some of them, indeed, pre-eminently involve the exchange of information. But a very large number of conversations are carried on in response to social and individual demands quite unrelated to the intellectual content of what is said. Perhaps the best instance of this fact is provided by the traditional English conversation about the weather. To some it has seemed strange that so many English people should spend so much of their time in exchanging information which is either already known to both parties or can more easily be acquired by a glance at the sky. Yet the apparent oddity of this practice depends only upon the belief that if two people talk to one another their object must be to exchange information.

The view, then, that conversation consists essentially in an exchange of ideas through verbal expression is too simple to meet the facts. I would like to suggest and try to justify another theory. According to this theory the fundamental process is an *exchange of attitudes*; and the unity of a conversation derives from the fact that it is an encounter between two individuals in which there is mutual *attitudinal* reaction. The display, and so the exchange, of attitudes may be mediated to a greater or less extent by the exchange of ideas through verbal expression. While the occasion may be utilised for the express purpose of exchanging ideas or information, psychologically speaking the characteristic phenomena of the conversation derive from the exchange of attitudes; and in trying to understand its mechanisms, we must look at it first from a genetic point of view. There is a real, not merely an apparent, similarity between the encounters of dogs and those of diplomats. In the one case, attitudes are exchanged without the aid of words; in the other, subtleties of verbal expression play a large part in this exchange.

Some such view of conversation as this must, I believe, be adopted if we are to understand at all the part played by

conversation in social encounter, and in particular during the interview. But a number of points providing independent justification may be brought forward. The first concerns the meaning of the word 'conversation'.[1] Its use to denote the exchange of ideas by articulate expression is comparatively recent. Originally it meant, and in certain contexts it still means, simply 'social existence', 'living in company with', 'co-habitation' (in the simple sense), 'habitual encounter with'. Something of this sense survives more completely in the adjectival form 'conversant with', which implies knowledge by acquaintance or direct contact rather than by information verbally conveyed. Originally, then, the word 'conversation' did not refer to one special mode of human intercourse but to human intercourse in general. Then, as the exchange of ideas, whose content was increasingly independent of individual experience, became gradually more and more dominant, and particularly with the growth of a scientific positivistic sentiment since the seventeenth century, the word came to refer simply to the exchange of *ideas* in articulate form. Such a change in the nature of conversation did not by any means entail the disappearance of its social function; the exchange of articulate ideas was widely utilised as a means of effecting exchange of attitudes.

A number of consequences, of some social significance, followed. Perhaps the most important of these has been the increasing difficulty with which social contact can be achieved between people of widely different classes, upbringing and intelligence—a tendency which may be said to have reached disturbing proportions. As more and more reliance is placed on the exchange of ideas as a means of exchanging attitudes, and as ideas become more and more integrated into separate systems, so conversation tends to lose, or to suffer perversion of, its basic social functions. That

[1] See e.g. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary.*

the fault lies less in the attitudes themselves than in the means of communicating them is shown by the fact that when individuals of widely differing type are placed in conditions of common purpose, and particularly of common danger, the basic social function of conversation tends to become reinstated,—the exchange of attitudes is released from restraint, and there may occur a striking return to what Prof. F. C. Bartlett has called 'primitive comradeship'.[1]

It would be out of place to pursue this question of the nature of conversation any further here. Indeed, it is a topic whose closer discussion ought to rest upon more empirical study than has yet been made.[2]

§ 2

The perception of attitudes

We have been engaged in discussing, in general terms, the psychological processes that go to make up what we have called the 'stimulatory' aspects of the interview, that is, the means by which the candidate is brought to *display* attitudes. We have now to turn to the cognitive aspect, and to consider some of the questions relating to the process of *perceiving* these attitudes.

In attempting even the beginnings of an analysis of this process, I cannot but feel painfully aware that a fool of a psychologist is rushing in where angels of discreet literary

[1] Cf. *Psychology and Primitive Culture.* Cambridge: University Press. 1923. pp. 37 ff.

[2] Professor T. H. Pear has for a long time insisted upon this point (cf. e.g. his *Psychology of Conversation.* London: Nelson. 1940) and has himself initiated some experimental investigation. The cardinal point to be kept in mind is the necessity for empirical analysis of conversations in terms *other* than their ideational content. The mechanisms by which ideas are exchanged in conversation are certainly interesting and important, but no less interesting are the non-cognitive psychological phenomena which go with this process.

talent and sensitive insight have feared to tread. Our sensibility to the attitudes and states of mind of other people is often so spontaneous and so devoid of conscious basis that there is little or nothing for the crude instruments of psychological analysis to work upon. Yet simple, immediate, and fleeting as the conscious aspect of the process may be, the existence of wide differences of capacity to achieve such perception, and the evident, if obscure, effect of past experience and practice in refining that capacity, suggest an underlying mechanism of great complexity. Accordingly, let us not embark upon any ambitious plan for formal analysis, but instead try to discuss two questions only, relying upon what has emerged from the experimental study of simpler instances of perception. These two questions, although of course they do not exhaust the whole field, are, I believe, truly fundamental. The first concerns the clues by which perception of attitudes is achieved, the second the manner in which experience and practice play their part in improving this capacity.

In every perceptual act two distinct sets of factors are involved. In the first place, there is a set of events external to the percipient—in the perception of attitudes these are connected with a second person and his immediate surroundings, —which we may call the perceptual *cues*. And these events in part determine what the percipient perceives. In the second place, certain *processes* go on *in the percipient himself*. These depend, as we all recognise, upon the past experience of the percipient (among other factors). In the experimental study of perception generally, the cues have received what is perhaps an unmerited attention, to the neglect of the perceptual processes. The reason for this is not difficult to find. Lying as they do in the external world, and susceptible to experimental control (as in simple cases they are), the cues afford an excellent line of approach to the

problems of perception in general. If, for instance, we wish to study visual distance-perception, it is possible to cause a subject to make distance-judgments under conditions of *reduced* cues, and so attempt to determine the relative importance of a number of factors. But we have no simple means of controlling the *internal* conditions under which the perceptual processes operate. In consequence, a tendency has grown up to neglect, or to underestimate the importance of, the perceptual processes themselves. While great ingenuity has been exercised in the analysis of the cues or data upon which perception—and judgment—depend, great *naïveté* has been shown about the manner in which the clues and data are utilised.

In consequence of this situation we are apt, unjustifiably, to suppose that to any given perceptual judgment there must correspond *one set of proper cues*. Cues become *clues*,—infallible, necessary, marks of a given state of affairs. To perceive them, it is supposed, is *ipso facto* to perceive the state of affairs. We come to speak of *the* signs of anger, *the* symptoms of pneumonia. And we tend to believe that there must be *one* way of perceiving anger or of diagnosing pneumonia,—namely that in which *the* signs and symptoms are noted, and in some more or less conscious way are related to what is known to be their significance. Now it is true that, if there really is a single state corresponding to what we call anger, and a single thing corresponding to what we call pneumonia, there must be a single, unvarying, set of signs which marks off each from other states or diseases. But in actual perceptual activity certainly no interviewer, and no physician, ever makes use of the whole set. There is always a selection of cues in perception. This is amply borne out by experimental studies of perception in cases very much simpler than those presented by attitudes and diseases.

But if selection of cues be a characteristic of perception,

it follows that different percipients may select differently. And we must beware of supposing that different selections differ always in being more or less 'complete' or 'correct'. Two men may perceive the same attitude in a third, using completely different cues. And we must beware, too, of supposing that the cues mentioned by the percipient, when he is challenged and justifies his perceptual judgment, are necessarily those which were functionally involved in the original perceptual act.

Of what determines the kind of selection that a given individual habitually makes, very little is known. It is plain that in a broad sense past experience and interests are important factors. It may be that temperamental factors, independent of past experience, also play a part. The actual selection used upon a given occasion is often dependent upon the mental state of the percipient at the time. Fatigue, for instance, may constrain him to make use of grosser cues than he uses habitually. Nor must it be supposed that because in a given case most of the cues that he habitually uses are missing, the percipient is necessarily at a loss. He is frequently able to make a fresh type of reaction to the situation, and employ other cues to the same end. For instance, he may usually employ chiefly the cues afforded by facial expression in perceiving the attitudes of others. But as in the evening, with failing light, these gradually cease to become available, he may instead utilise those provided by tone of voice. Perception is no event occurring inevitably in a passive organism when a certain set of external conditions are fulfilled. It is a skilled and purpose activity of the organism.

The power effectively to *select* certain aspects of a person's total behaviour, and to *utilise* these correctly in the apprehension of his attitudes demands the exercise of a skill. And it is chiefly in accordance with the degree in which they possess such skill that different observers, faced by the same external

events, will succeed or fail in becoming aware of the attitudes of others. The amount of skill possessed by any individual will depend in part upon innate capacity, and in part upon the opportunities that he has had (and the use that he has made of these opportunities) to acquire it. It is noteworthy that, in common with many other types of observation, this skill involves the economical and well-directed exercise not only of processes within the observer but also to some extent of his outward activity. As in examining a strange object we allow our gaze to play over its various parts, turn it over in our hands, and hold it at various distances from our eyes, while all the time our apprehension of it is being built up,—so in examining a person the process would often be incomplete without such probing and searching as conversation permits.

We have spoken of this skill as involving the *selection* and *utilisation* of cues, but it is essential in this connection to make the proviso that the more fully the skill is developed, the less does it tend to involve any conscious, witting process of searching for what is relevant, or of assessment of the significance of a combination of such selected cues. These elements are present in the highly skilled act of apprehension only in the sense that the observer, when called upon to justify or explain his formulated apprehension, will couch his statement in these terms.

The skill in question involves past experience, though not in the sense that specific instances from the past are recalled and compared with the present. Nor can we suppose that the way in which the past operates is through the reduction of instances already experienced to general laws, and the conscious application of these laws to the present. As Sir Henry Head originally suggested in connection with the highly special case of postural perception, and as Professor F. C. Bartlett later indicated in relation to perceptual recognition and apprehension generally, the present apprehension is

presented, or unfolds itself, "already charged with what has gone before". It would be out of place to enter here upon a discussion of how it is that through experience and practice a mechanism is built which (*a*) makes a selection of the available data, (*b*) directs the economical exercise of searching activities by the organism, (*c*) assesses this complex of data by suitable standards, and (*d*) thereby presents a unitary and significant apprehension to consciousness.

How does this somewhat abstract discussion bear upon the practical issues of perceiving attitudes in the interview? Chiefly, I think, by suggesting the need for caution in accepting conventional stereotyped views regarding the relative merits of 'intuitive' and 'scientific' modes of apprehension. There is a prevailing popular tendency to seek to replace 'intuitive' methods, wherever they may be found, by 'scientific' procedures. In this attempt we sometimes find that anything which can be dubbed 'intuitive' is treated as though it were simply baseless speculation, whereas mere planned communicable routine often glories in the name of 'science'. Unquestionably the procedure of the skilled observer of human attitudes is 'intuitive', inasmuch as it cannot be formulated or justified at large, except by subsequent events. It does not, however, follow that it is any less effective, or any more efficiently replaceable by a 'scientific' procedure, than is that of the skilled tennis player. The poor tennis player does not seek or obtain from the professional a scientific statement of how the latter plays his shots: instead, he obtains advice and hints which enable him to improve his own power of play. Scientific, in the sense of rational, economical, procedure, might indeed be applied to the *learning* both of tennis and of the perception of attitudes; but a game of tennis and an interview alike are occasions unsuited to the exercise of scientific method.

The perception of attitudes in the interview, then, demands

the exercise of a skill by reason of the conditions in which it must be carried out. It is possible that other and more reliable means of detecting these attitudes may eventually be evolved. But such detection could not, in the nature of the case, replace that skilled perception which can only be separated from the whole procedure of the interview by an abstraction which is ultimately invalid. There may be short cuts to the acquisition of this skill; but there is no way of circumventing the necessity for the skill itself.

§ 3
Judgment

When we decide, or say, that a certain person is reliable, or sociable, we are making a judgment about him. Precisely what constitutes the making of a judgment is a psychological question about which there has been a quantity of discussion that would not repay examination here. For our present purpose it is sufficient to accept Professor R. S. Woodworth's convenient provisional definition:—"A judgment is an answer to a question".[1] But we will inquire a little more closely into the conditions in which it is possible for us to answer questions of the kind "Is this man reliable?" It must be noticed that I am not now considering the conditions in which it is possible for us to answer such a question *correctly*, but of the conditions in which it is possible for us to answer it *at all*.

It would, I suppose, be commonly held that one of the more important conditions which must be satisfied in order that we should be able to answer such a question is that we should possess a clear idea of what we understand by the predicate or quality in respect of which judgment is made.

[1] Woodworth. *Experimental Psychology*. New York: Holt & Co. 1938. p. 368.

The problem then becomes one of deciding what is meant by possessing a clear idea of a predicate or a concept. One criterion which is frequently adopted is to ask whether the meaning of the concept can be expounded verbally, or 'defined'. This suffers from the disadvantage that large numbers of people are, when pressed, incapable of giving any satisfactory definition of many of the concepts which they constantly use in making judgments. Indeed there is often more disagreement about the meaning of a concept than about the judgments which are made in terms of it. It would seem that often our power of making good and consistent judgments is independent of our capacity to explain the meaning of the concepts involved. Of greater practical importance, and perhaps of greater psychological interest, than the precise meaning of the concepts we employ, is *the possession of well-articulated standards or scales of reference* in respect of the concepts.

Eggs vary in size, but if a man has never seen an egg before it will be futile to ask whether the one we show him is a large or a small egg. But if we show him a succession of eggs, he will begin to venture judgments about their size. At first the attempt to make such judgments may involve the conscious comparison of the egg that he is shown with his memory of eggs that he has seen in the past. But gradually he will develop an implicit automatic standard of egg-size, if his interest is aroused and maintained. If any purpose be served by doing so, he will become amazingly sensitive to egg-size and consistent in his judgments. The natural scale of reference thus built up is implicit, inasmuch as judgment does not consist in any conscious act of measuring each egg against an imaginary standard egg or series of standard eggs. The egg that he sees is presented to him already measured up, so to speak, as a large egg or a small egg or a middling-sized egg or, if financial questions are involved, as an egg

that he would buy at half a crown or at two shillings a dozen. But if now we ask him what he means by saying that a certain egg is large, and what are the criteria by which he judges it to be so, he will probably become confused. About the criteria he may be unable to say anything at all. As regards the meaning of 'large', if he is something of a mathematician, he may explain to us the principles of frequency-distribution of a characteristic in a population, and suggest that his standard of size must somehow be bound up with the frequency with which eggs of different sizes have occurred in his experience of eggs. And, if we now ask him what he means by *size* in general, the discussion is likely to become either philosophical or ill-tempered. Interesting as these explanations may be, they clearly have little immediate connection with the fact that he has developed a special skill in regard to eggs, and can exercise that skill to his advantage.

For eggs, now, read human beings; and for size, any qualities of personality in respect of which we make judgments about other people. I suggest that the conditions in which is is possible for us to make judgments about the personal qualities of other people are basically the same as those in which it is possible for our hypothetical egg-merchant to make judgments about the size of eggs. Both acts are manifestations of a skill requiring the construction through experience of an implicit and well-articulated standard. The problems of the manner in which such standards are built up and maintained are ones which have scarcely been broached as yet by experimental psychology. Following Sir Henry Head's usage in his discussion of the basis of sensory judgment,[1] I will call these combined standards, derived from past experience, 'schemata'. We must, I think, suppose that to each concept that we use in making judgments there

[1] Cf. H. Head. *Studies in Neurology*. Oxford: University Press. 1920. vol. 2, pp. 605 ff.

corresponds a *schema*. Where concepts overlap in their sense or application, we must suppose the corresponding schemata to be interlocked. To distinguish this type of schema from another which we shall have occasion to discuss immediately, we may speak of *concept-schemata*.[1]

We must now turn briefly to another aspect of the making of judgments about things and people. Some of the objects in question are such that the features of them in respect of which we make a judgment are presented to us within a short period of time. Of this kind are eggs and coloured patches. But others are such that only single incomplete aspects of them can be presented to us at a given moment or in a short period of time, while the judgments that we pretend to make about them are ones having reference not to single phases or appearances of them but to their totality. We can, it is true, make judgments about particular aspects of people or about their behaviour on specific occasions. But we also claim to make judgments about the people themselves in terms that are independent of any special occasion. What, then, in such a case, is the object to which the implicit standard, or *concept-schema*, is applied? We must, I think, postulate that successive apprehensions of a particular object or person give rise to the building of an *object-schema*, a kind of active *résumé* of the objects in question. Judgment—the answering of a question—about the object then would involve some kind of functional interaction between the relevant concept- and object-schemata. In what this interaction consists we cannot discuss here. We are concerned with the basic *necessary* conditions of judgment.

Judgment, then, is no simple act of attributing a predicate,

[1] Mr. A. W. P. Wolters has argued (*Brit. Journ. Psych.*, 1933, vol. 24, pp. 133–143) that from a psychological, as opposed to a logical, point of view, concepts *are* schemata, although his line of argument has little in common with that advanced here, and derives from Bartlett's notion of the schema rather than Head's.

whose meaning we can expound, to an object with which we are acquainted. It involves the establishment through experience of an implicit, *functional*, standard. And this process cannot be described in terms of mere intellectual acquaintance or recall of previous instances. The exercise of judgment is a skill; and to say this does not merely mean that some people are better judges than others. It implies the existence in the judge of an active *function*,—in many respects akin to that which makes a man a good tennis-player.

§ 4

The interview as a whole

We have considered in this and the preceding chapters some of the processes and elements into which the interview can provisionally be analysed. But we must emphasise once again the fact that such abstraction is ultimately invalid. Throughout the whole course of the interview each aspect is dependent upon the others. The stimulation of the candidate by questions and by the display of attitudes is no less related to the concurrent processes of observation and assessment than are the experiments of the scientist to the half-formed conclusions in his mind. Moreover, every observation consists in the perception of an event seen within the context of the assessment, in so far as assessment has already formed; while at the same time the assessment itself is changing under the influence of the observed events.

In the same way, while it is useful in discussion to distinguish the maintenance and development of favourable conditions from the actual provision of stimuli, in practice the two processes are inseparable, at least during certain phases of the interview. The function of many questions asked, particularly at the outset of the interview, is dual. They are intended to improve the general atmosphere and

to open up relations with the candidate. But they also seek information and provide attitudinal stimuli. Further, the very meaning of many questions is a function of the general conditions that have been aroused when the question is asked.

Skill in interviewing, then, depends not only upon the mastery of the several activities which go to make it up, each of which may be exercised in other connections, but also upon the capacity to carry them on simultaneously and to combine them in one unified performance directed to a definite purpose.

Chapter IV

THE SETTING OF THE INTERVIEW

§ 1

Introductory

IN THIS chapter, I want to give a brief discussion of some isolated topics which do not easily fit into the next two chapters where we shall be concerned with the processes occurring in the interview situation itself. These topics are (1) the material circumstances of the interview; (2) the general conditions affecting its duration; (3) note-taking; and (4) the personal qualities and the general behaviour and attitude of the interviewer himself.

§ 2

The candidate in the waiting-room

It is plain that the outcome of any human encounter, and therefore the fulfilment of its purpose, depend very closely upon the personal characteristics of the parties to it and upon the general strategy and particular tactics adopted by them during its actual course. But it would not be wise to underestimate the possible effects which may be exerted by the material circumstances of the encounter. Indeed in certain circumstances, the material conditions—the time, the place, the setting—may be decisive, and purely tactical skill powerless to discount them. In so far as the interview for the assessment of personal qualities is concerned, the chief material circumstances of consequences are two:—those

relating to the manner in which the candidate is kept waiting for his interview, and those belonging to the general setting of the interview itself.

The general principle, that candidates for interview,—especially where their future life is likely to be affected in an important degree,—should be kept waiting for a period as short, and in surroundings as comfortable, as possible is one more honoured in theory than in practice. Humanity and efficiency are alike concerned in this matter, although the practical difficulties of satisfying the demands of the former may sometimes perhaps conceal the reality of the latter. It is generally recognised that prolonged waiting in an uncomfortable forbidding room or in a draughty public corridor not only is unpleasant for the candidate but may seriously disturb his state of mind. There is, however, little agreement as to how far this disturbance may prejudice the impression that the interviewer subsequently forms of him. Plainly it will depend largely upon the temperament of the candidate. The general question of the state of mind of the candidate and its relation to the possibility of accurately assessing his character, are discussed elsewhere in this book. We may concede for the present that there is no positive advantage in having the candidate in a nervous state, if this can be avoided, and that there may in some cases be a grave disadvantage. Before, however, we consider how such disturbance of mind may be minimised, it will be as well to ask what the nature of the disturbance is. It is usual to speak of it as a state of 'nervousness' or 'anxiety',—terms which are too general and afford little insight into its actual character.

I suggest that this state of mind is not the product of anything so simple as the mere contemplation of an ordeal. The candidate in the waiting-room is the victim of violent, if temporary, conflict; and the circumstances prevent him from taking any action to achieve its immediate resolution.

On the one hand, he desires to avoid or he fears the interview itself; on the other hand, once he is in the waiting-room he cannot escape—he is held there by circumstances, as surely as if the door were locked. Further, and worse, there is nothing for him to do which is relevant to the conflict-situation.

This analysis, if correct, will suggest the lines along which palliative measures can be effective. In the first place, it is plain that anything that will serve to lessen the ordeal—such as the display of courtesy, kindliness and respect for the candidate, or the suggestion of a general atmosphere of humanity—will diminish the intensity of the conflict, and so reduce the resulting disturbance. Among the concrete measures that may be taken in this direction are the following:—a civilised manner of receiving the candidate at the door; pleasantness of manner in the individual who receives him; thoughtful arrangement and furnishing of the waiting-room (thoughtfulness is not synonymous with elaborateness); and, above all, warmth. The last-named is important because a feeling of cold often accompanies such nervous states, causing further deterioration.

Conflict-situations become the more intolerable, and their effects the more profound, the longer they last. It will be a sound general rule, therefore, to cut short the period of waiting as far as circumstances will allow. A certain amount of waiting is, of course, unavoidable,—a fact which is perhaps apt to encourage the comfortable belief that waiting in general is not a matter of importance. In so far, however, as the period of waiting is inevitable, something may be done to mitigate its unpleasantness by providing some activity for the candidate; and if possible this should be relevant to the interview situation. We must distinguish between the mere provision of distraction, and the provision of something to do which, the candidate can feel, may influence the whole

situation. A person in a state of conflict is in any case not easily distractible. He suffers from a certain paralysis of the faculties; the humours of ancient *Punches*, and the intellectual delights of trade journals are unlikely to strike the mind with any great force. Pure distraction will act as a palliative only if a very strong interest can be aroused.

Better, then, than the attempt simply to distract the candidate is the provision of something for him to do which is relevant to the whole situation. The task must be one that is straightforward. It must not be of such difficulty that the only result is a sense of failure or possible failure. But it must demand attention. The filling-in of an 'application form' constitutes such a task; in some institutions it is in fact the practice to make the candidate do this during the waiting period, although the motive is generally convenience. It is, of course, not always convenient or possible to give this task to the candidates. But it is worth while considering the possibility of providing *some* such task (even though no account be taken of the manner of its fulfilment) when the wait must be long and detrimental to the candidates' state of mind.

A second suggestion was made to me by an expert woman interviewer. It was to the effect that a mirror should be provided in the waiting-room. This again offers the opportunity for the candidate to fill in time in a manner which seems to him relevant, while at the same time relieving anxieties regarding personal appearance.

Another point which rarely receives the attention that it deserves is the provision of lavatory accommodation. 'Nervous' states very often exercise a profound effect upon the kidneys and even upon the bowels; and the resulting discomfort in its turn leads to severe loss of personal confidence and deterioration in the general bearing of the candidate. Furthermore, it is desirable that this accommodation

should be so provided that the candidate has no need to embarrass himself by asking about it.

As regards the effect upon one another of a number of candidates in the waiting-room, this, it appears, is generally believed to be without any great moment. In cases such as appointment to higher posts, where it is scarcely seemly to herd the candidates together, arrangements are usually made so that there is no occasion for them to meet. Several interviewers, however, have suggested to me that in any case it is not advisable for candidates to return to the presence of the others after their interview.

On the whole, we may perhaps conclude that, although the conditions of waiting are of little importance by comparison with other features of the interview, they are worth attention if only because we cannot afford to despise any improvement in the interviewing procedure, however minor.

§ 3

The general setting of the interview

The general setting of the interview itself has perhaps been the object of more attention in the past than any other single condition relevant to its success. It has long been the practice of the law-court to dispose its furniture in such a way as to assist the less palpable resources of justice. And the good old principle of placing the candidate with his face to the light is still maintained by many, often with more vigour than reflection.

It would seem, from the experience of the interviewers whom I have questioned, that the considerations relating to the general setting are four:—reasonable comfort, the maintenance of true conversation, the possibility of adequately observing the candidate's bearing and behaviour, and privacy. Reasonable comfort is conducive to an atmosphere

of friendliness and to the natural development of personal relations with the candidate. It is usual to place the candidate on the opposite side of the desk at which the interviewer sits; but some prefer the candidate to sit at their side. In any case, the candidate ought to be given a chair that is comfortable, yet which at the same time compels him to sit up straight. This position assists both the maintenance of true conversation and adequate observation.

Conversation is an infinitely subtle thing, demanding far more than the mere exchange of remarks, and some of its characteristics have been noted in the last chapter. Here we are concerned only with the material conditions that may exercise an effect upon it. Among these are, we may suppose, the bodily postures of the two parties, the distance between them, and the facilities that each has for observing the facial expression and gestures of the other. For some reason, difficult to analyse, any difference between their postures imposes an inevitable lack of symmetry upon the whole encounter, so that a certain advantage automatically accrues to one of the two. Although it is not easy to lay down any general rule regarding the effects of these differences of posture, I am inclined to think that the advantage lies with the person who is seated upright, provided that his chair be reasonably comfortable and not obviously inferior in quality to that occupied by the other. Petty advantages of this kind are detrimental to good interviewing; and the ideal arrangement would seem to consist in providing similar chairs for both interviewer and candidate. It must be remembered, however, that it is somewhat unsafe to abstract from the total material situation any one factor, such as the chairs that are sat upon. The facts that the interviewer, not the candidate, is the owner of the room and that he is permanently established in it while the candidate only visits it, and that every desk is an asymmetric object, conspire

to throw the initial balance of advantage in favour of the interviewer.

Another interesting effect of material circumstance upon conversation is that of the distance separating the two parties. This would probably repay empirical investigation. A coherent exchange having the properties of true conversation becomes impossible if the distance separating the two parties is greater than a certain amount, even though the comprehensibility of speech is not impaired. The reasons for this are not easy to determine, but presumably they concern the utilisation of minute cues of facial expression, gesture and vocal inflection in conversation. Where the distance is increased, these either become imperceptible; or, if adjustment is made in the general level of behaviour (loudness of voice, magnitude of gesture, etc.) to meet the changed conditions, the cues become altered in significance and unable to convey what is intended. However, the correct distance for conversation can usually be chosen intuitively.

Somewhat similar considerations apply to the conditions making for the adequate observation of the candidate. A good light is plainly necessary for this, but this does not necessarily imply an intense light. If we are correct in maintaining that to place the candidate deliberately at a disadvantage from the outset does nothing to assist the assessment of his character, it follows that the lighting should be impartial as between interviewer and candidate. Those whose opinions I have sought on this matter were for the most part in favour of illumination as natural as possible, falling equally upon both parties.

Two other points relating to the observation of the candidate are worth bearing in mind. Some interviewers find that movements and posture of the *whole* of the candidate's body, and not merely of the upper half, are significant for judgment. For this reason, there may be some advantage in making the

candidate sit so that his legs are visible. In the second place, in order to observe the face of a female candidate, removal of the hat may be necessary.

Privacy is a desirable feature of the interview, but one which in practice can rarely be made absolute. The interviewer usually has functions other than interviewing to perform, and must inevitably be interrupted by callers and the telephone. Nevertheless,—and this is the opinion of most of the experienced interviewers whom I have questioned about this,—it is well worth while to reduce interruptions of this kind to the lowest practicable amount. It is almost inevitable that when a nervous candidate has been brought to speak of more or less intimate matters, and the conversation is interrupted by the ring of a telephone or by a knock on the door, its resumption is attended with embarrassment, and sometimes with difficulty. The candidate, in the first place, is often much embarrassed by his own attempts to pay no attention to the telephone conversation or the caller. Secondly, he has had time during the interruption to dwell upon what has just been said and upon what he was about to say. In addition, it is frequently impossible for the conversation to be resumed at the exact point at which it was broken off: a telephone call or a visit almost inevitably induces a state of retrospective amnesia in the interviewer, demanding a return to some previous point.

Lack of privacy may arise from the presence of a third party. Some interviewers are strongly of the opinion that this may constitute a real bar to the proper conduct of the interview. But how far this is really the case is a little difficult to decide. Provided that the witness sits quietly and does nothing to distract either interviewer or candidate, no particular disturbance seems to result. A number of interviewers who allowed me to be present at their interviews told me, sometimes with surprise, that my presence made no difference

whatsoever. But this opinion is by no means universal, especially among vocational psychologists and psychotherapists who aim at the greatest possible intimacy. It is satisfactory to know that the presence of a third party does not necessarily disturb the course of an interview. For if at some future time it seemed desirable to attempt the *training* of interviewers, practical demonstrations would be of great importance.

A final point was raised by one of my expert informants who, as an anthropologist, is very sensitive to the appropriateness of her behaviour to her surroundings, and to the feelings that it arouses in others. She said that the most important precaution in regard to the general material setting of the interview is to ensure that the candidate is not made *un*easy by the perception that the interviewer is trying to set him at his ease. The arrangements made for the candidate's comfort must not over-run the normal social conventions belonging to the context.

The material circumstances of the interview are perhaps only important in a negative sense. No skill in the arrangement of furniture and lighting can redeem the bad interviewer. To some interviewers, too, these things possess little significance in either a positive or a negative sense. One very shrewd judge of character told me that he and the candidate might walk around the room if they liked; and to my knowledge both of them very often do so. But on the whole, there can be no harm in giving thought to the arrangement of the circumstances, if thereby the task of the interviewer is lightened. It is hard enough in any event.

§ 4

Duration of the interview

How long a given interview lasts is of course very largely determined by the factors internal to it. The variation of

duration among a series of similar interviews may be very great. Moreover, the average time required for a given type of interview will depend upon a number of factors, such as the purpose for which the interview is used. Another general factor which operates is, plainly, the time at the disposal of the interviewer. It is a fairly common complaint among interviewers that they do not have enough time in which to conduct each interview. These factors I do not wish to consider. But a further question arises.—Are there any psychological factors which tend to impose limits upon the useful duration of the interview in general? Are there any reasons for supposing that interviews prolonged beyond a certain point show a rapidly diminishing return in effectiveness for the extra time expended, or that a certain minimum period is required before the procedure begins to be effective at all?

So far as the factors tending to impose a maximum value upon the useful duration of the interview are concerned, my talks with interviewers seemed to suggest the following as the chief.—The first concerns the process of establishing *rapport* with an individual. The ordinary business of getting to know a person is one which demands a decent spacing of encounters. Few people will go beyond a certain point in displaying their inner feelings at their first meeting with somebody else. The skilful interviewer will recognise the point at which his relationship to the candidate has ceased to develop. Prolongation of the interview beyond this point can serve no useful purpose; it may even be detrimental to the progress of the relationship on a subsequent occasion.

Another factor tending to impose a practical maximum upon the favourable duration is fatigue, both in interviewer and candidate. This fatigue may be specific to a particular interview, the interviewer recovering from it when the next candidate presents himself. It is sometimes maintained that

fatigue *in the candidate* is favourable to accurate assessment, since it may weaken any defences that he has erected.

The other general question we may ask about duration concerns its *minimum* practical value. The limiting factor here is, presumably, the unnatural state of mind of most candidates at the outset of the interview. Whether there are any general rules concerning the length of time required for the worst phase of the candidate's nervousness to subside I do not know. The general question of the relation between the duration of the interview, particularly when this is short, and accuracy of assessment (as indicated by agreement between different judges) is one which might well be made the subject of experimental investigation.

§ 5
Note-taking

The practice of note-taking is largely subject to individual tendencies and predilections. It would be foolish to ask whether the practice in itself is good or bad. I can only bring forward some considerations relating to its advantages and disadvantages in different circumstances.

In the first place, whenever and however notes are taken, a certain skill in combining the process with the conversational aspect of the interview is essential. The interviewer must develop either the capacity to write intelligible notes while actually engaged in conversation, or the power to intersperse writing with conversation without breaking up the latter into a series of disjointed fragments. Some skilled interviewers are able to introduce quite long pauses without any disturbance in the natural course of their talk. The possibility of doing this rests almost wholly upon choice of the correct moment for making the break. Above all, the candidate must not be interrupted before he has expressed

himself to his own satisfaction upon a given point. That his spontaneous remarks come to an end is not in itself evidence that this stage has been reached. For one reason or another he may have failed to express exactly what he wished; perhaps nothing is more prejudicial to the conduct of the interview than constantly to leave the candidate in a state of incomplete self-expression. It must not be forgotten that many candidates will cease to talk while notes are being made, simply because they feel they ought not to interrupt the interviewer. Even where the candidate does not cease to talk, his conversation may become uncertain, hesitant and disjointed. He has a feeling of doubt as to whether he ought to be talking, and whether the interviewer's attention is or is not directed upon what he is saying. The candidate ought to be left in no doubt as to whether the interviewer wishes the conversation to be continued during these periods.

Some people have a rooted objection to a record being made of what they say, especially upon certain topics and before a good relationship has been established. The interviewer must be able to decide in each case how far this is likely to prejudice the interview, and be ready to modify his practice if this appears desirable. In general, it is obviously foolish to try to conceal the fact that notes are being taken; but some interviewers, in order to save the candidate the possible embarrassment of seeing his more confidential utterances committed to paper, adopt the practice of following up these with questions of neutral import, in order to give themselves the opportunity of making the notes that they wish to make about what has gone before.

On the other hand, as one of my informants suggested, note-taking possesses certain incidental advantages. It allows the interviewer to take his eyes off the candidate without appearing to let his attention wander. Particularly at the beginning of the interview, before a natural conversation has

set in, a constant regard directed upon the candidate may be disconcerting. He may feel that something is being expected of him beyond what it lies in his mind to say. Taking notes, too, may act directly in increasing the candidate's confidence by emphasising the importance of the situation. This effect may be increased if the interviewer is able to perceive what the candidate considers important and makes notes accordingly. The candidate will gain confidence if he sees that the interviewer grasps what he is trying to convey in its proper proportions.

§ 6

Personal qualities in the interviewer

It is generally acknowledged that some people make better interviewers than others. We constantly make judgments about the capacity of other people to judge character. Some are able notably to control the course of an encounter—to draw out the shy and to lead on the reticent and the talkative, so that they give expression to aspects of themselves which are more fundamental than those evoked by the immediate situation; whereas others, we judge, notably lack these abilities. But it is not very easy to determine the basis upon which we make such judgments.

Although it appears to be generally agreed that certain 'personal qualities' are desirable in the interviewer, it is a matter of some difficulty to get these specified. In reply to my questions put to experienced interviewers, a quality variously described as "the ability to put people at their ease", "ability to make contact with people" was frequently mentioned, and included in this was "tact". Among other desirable temperamental qualities given me were "goodwill", "an attitude of sympathetic *rapport*", "sensitiveness", "capacity to make other people respond", "genuine sincerity",

"patience", and "persistence". The value of a relatively unobtrusive personality was also stressed by some people; and this includes such more specific matters as the absence of a loud voice, the ability to keep strong views in the background, and the ability to listen rather than talk.

More on the cognitive side, such general qualities as "power to assess men", "intelligence" (not necessarily of the academic kind), "a critical faculty", and "detachment" were mentioned. More specifically, the power of quick, comprehensive and objective observation was stressed. This is obviously of importance, since the time factor is in practice one of the chief limitations upon successful interviewing.

These opinions serve more to display the complexity of the interviewer's art than to define the ideal interviewer. But it seems clear that two main conditions must be fulfilled. The interviewer must be a person able to break through the immediate behaviour of the candidate, which is likely to be determined very largely by the interview situation itself, and thus obtain real clues to his more basic qualities. Secondly, he must be capable of observing these clues accurately, quickly and comprehensively, and of forming a judgment unbiased by irrelevant considerations. Now it is plain that the temperamental qualities which will make for success in the first of these tasks are, in a certain degree, opposed to those required for the second. The ability to establish friendly relations at short notice with a large variety of people, to draw them out, and to cause them to display something more of themselves than the situation itself evokes, is one which demands a certain relaxation of judgment. On the other hand, adequate observation requires detachment, the maintenance of a critical attitude and a freedom from bias difficult of attainment in the circumstances, which ostensibly are those of friendly human intercourse. A nice balance of

these broadly opposite characteristics, in which sincere friendliness in no way dulls critical appraisement, and judgment though honest is discreet, must be sought rather than commanded.

§ 7

The bearing and conduct of the interviewer

The force of circumstances rather than choice, however, makes interviewers. Is it possible to suggest any general principles which ought to govern the personal conduct and bearing of those who find themselves conducting interviews? Specific rules we cannot look for, since these are dependent upon special contexts. But it is reasonable to try to lay down certain regulatory principles which in each particular context must be satisfied.

The first of these concerns the appropriateness of the interviewer's behaviour to the social context of each interview. At least two factors serve to define this context. In the first place, social convention provides a scheme for the regulation and mediation of intercourse between persons of different age, social status, and so forth. It is important to notice that the function of this regulatory conventional framework is as much one of mediation as of limitation. Social conventions serve to render possible true intercourse between persons of widely different background. Without them an encounter would possess no definite form, and the exchange of opinions and attitudes could not be confined to what is relevant to its purpose. In the second place, a special aspect of the context derives from the fact that the encounter is an interview, not a casual conversation. This inevitably modifies whatever might otherwise be the relationship between interviewer and candidate.

Such questions, therefore, as those of whether the inter-

viewer should rise on the entry of the candidate, shake hands, offer a cigarette and so forth must be settled in accordance with the ordinary code of behaviour appropriate to the social relations of the two parties, reasonably interpreted in view of the fact that the situation is that of an interview and not an informal aimless chat. Nevertheless, there are some forms of behaviour inappropriate to any social context. One of these is 'heartiness',—at once a form of discourtesy and a confession of failure.

The regulation of the interviewer's behaviour by the canons of social convention, however, will defeat its own end if pressed so far that the encounter is rendered colourless. For this reason a certain informality ought to leaven convention. If this should surprise, without unduly shocking, the candidate, the somewhat abnormal attitude in which he probably entered the room may be shaken off. Friendliness, too, is an indispensable feature of the interview, and can be shown without in any way transgressing the social demands of the context. (To this I shall return at the end of this chapter.) At the same time, it must be remembered that the concrete form of its expression is a function of the context, and must be modified, too, to suit each candidate. The audible creaks of a jerky mechanical cordiality will disgust the intelligent candidate and bewilder the sensitive.

The second general principle to be borne in mind is the avoidance of criticism or disapproval. This applies not only to verbally expressed criticism, but also, and more strongly, to other, less easily controlled, behavioural expressions of attitude, such as tone of voice, facial expression and gesture. Some interviewers with whom I have discussed this question were equally emphatic in condemning indications of approval.

There are two reasons at least to support these opinions. In the first place, sensitive people are apt to respond strongly

to any indication of blame, criticism or moral disapproval. The habitual mode of reaction consists in the rapid erection of a more or less impenetrable barrier between themselves and their immediate social environment. Although the primary function of this is to prevent the access of further painful stimuli, it is also effective in inhibiting normal behaviour. The hurt, sensitive, individual becomes dull, lifeless and unresponsive. The expression of approval, too, to those who are unable to make easy adjustment to their social environment is apt to produce forms of over-reaction in some cases and of inhibition in others. Both of these consequences of the ill-advised expression of approval add to the difficulties of assessing personal qualities. Where approval is expressly used for the purpose of encouragement, the interviewer must be sure that he is approving something which the candidate *wants* to be approved. Sensitive people who labour under feelings of being misunderstood sometimes develop ambivalent tendencies in regard to approval by others. In particular, they are apt to feel insulted when approval is expressed too obviously from considerations of politeness rather than from real appreciation.

In the second place, the expression of approval or disapproval is apt to produce forms of behaviour in consonance with the general trend of the interviewer's predilections so manifested. It is quite unnecessary to suppose that such behaviour is deliberate, or brought about by any conscious process in the candidate's mind. The expression of approval and disapproval is one of the elementary factors in the general process of induction of attitude inseparable from any encounter between two individuals.

To a strong expression of the interviewer's attitude of criticism the independent-minded candidate may react by the adoption of an antagonistic attitude. In general, this effect is not conducive to accurate character assessment (although

it is a gambit sometimes deliberately employed by interviewers and, as such, has its uses). But such a crude reaction is easily avoided; the danger lies rather in clues less overt than verbal statement,—in facial expression, tone of voice and small gesture. These, even in the most independent-minded candidate tend to induce unwitting acceptance rather than rejection of the interviewer's attitude. To control these small tell-tale elements of behaviour without seriously disrupting the ordinary course of human encounter is a matter of the greatest difficulty. To do so requires long experience and training: conscious intention alone can achieve little. Partly, perhaps, for this reason, some interviewers make a practice of allowing the tenor of the interview to be set by the candidate himself as far as possible.

§ 8

The interviewer's attitude of mind

Closely related to the bearing and behaviour of the interviewer is the general attitude of mind which he either deliberately adopts, or which is induced by the circumstances. Some interviewers, for instance, find it helpful and sometimes even essential to adopt more or less consciously an attitude of cordiality, friendship or tolerance at the outset. The reasons for this are various. Interviewing may be an unpleasant duty to the interviewer. The candidates may be unattractive. Fatigue, or the pressure of other work, may make the occasion irksome. Personal aversions to particular types of candidate may have to be overcome, yet without over-compensation. It is difficult to say how the correct attitude is taken up. In some individuals it is a matter of conscious and sometimes painful effort. In others it arises more spontaneously. But the adoption of an appropriate *general attitude* at the outset of the interview is a matter of

greater importance than the continuous maintenance of an effort to *behave* appropriately throughout its course. As an eminent psychologist remarked *à propos* of this question, "each interview is a world to itself. One hour I am a schoolmaster, the next a parson".

Chapter V

THE CONDUCT OF THE INTERVIEW

§ 1

Introductory

WE ARE now in a position to discuss the conduct of the interview, and the topics and tactics of the conversation which takes place in it. But to present this discussion in an orderly and coherent fashion is a matter of great difficulty: so closely are the different aspects of the whole process interwoven. Chronologically, most interviews have a beginning, a middle, and an end; but this division corresponds with no clear-cut distinction of phases in the psychological processes which take place. As I have already said, the stimulatory and the cognitive parts of the interviewer's activity run concurrently. It is true that at the outset the efforts of the interviewer are chiefly directed to establishing *rapport*, and later to utilising the relationship so established. But the establishment of *rapport* is not a matter of *reaching* a certain state of affairs: that state of affairs must be *maintained*, and indeed may be continuously developed, throughout the whole conversation. In the same way, the use to which *rapport* is put need not be confined to the period following its establishment: observation of the kinds of attitudes which may be evoked at various stages *during* its establishment is often of great value in the service of assessment. And the process of assessment itself, although in general it only reaches the stage of explicit formulation at the end of the interview, is one which is continuously taking place throughout.

In these circumstances some more or less arbitrary way of treating the various questions regarding the interview itself will have to be adopted. I propose to adopt the following.—First, I shall consider some questions of 'general strategy',—notably those which concern the use of planning and routine, and those relating to the use of the direct and the indirect methods of approach. Secondly, I shall discuss topics of conversation, and try to state the conditions which govern their choice and the order in which they are broached. Thirdly, I shall try to formulate some of the tactical devices which are commonly used in conversation, both in the induction and in the evocation of attitudes.

§ 2

Planning and routine

In Chapters II and III we attempted to determine the broad psychological basis of the interview for the assessment of personal qualities. Now we have to ascertain whether it is possible to suggest any principles of a more practical and concrete a nature, which are sufficiently universal in scope to be independent of variations due to such inevitable factors as differences between candidates, between interviewers, and between particular purposes for which interviews for the assessment of personal qualities are employed.

At the outset of this discussion, I would like to make it clear that I cannot help feeling very sceptical about the possibility of arriving at any such principles, in so far as they may be intended to dictate procedure; although, in so far as the acquisition of skill in interviewing is concerned, such principles might, if they could be formulated, serve a useful purpose. For there are undeniably certain questions relating to the 'general strategy' of the interview which give rise to important differences of opinion. The chief of these

concerns *routine* and its value. Nobody, of course, would suggest that, for the general purposes of character-assessment, it is either desirable or possible to plan the interview beforehand to the last detail. Such a method certainly has its application in the collection of personal information, and it possesses some obvious advantages over the written questionnaire. It might indeed be employed for the collection of information upon which an assessment of personal qualities could subsequently be based. But this would not constitute an interview for the assessment of these qualities, the advantage of the spoken over the written question relating here chiefly to the collection of information, not to the assessment itself. Between so rigidly planned a procedure and the interview in which nothing is planned beforehand there lies a whole range of possibilities.

We must distinguish between *planning an interview* and *adopting a routine*. The former implies that on each occasion the encounter is planned beforehand in greater or less detail. It does not imply that the plan is always carried out in its full detail, or that the same procedure is closely followed upon successive occasions. The latter, on the other hand, certainly means that procedure on a number of occasions is the same in certain definable respects. We must distinguish, too, between unwittingly following a routine and deliberately *adopting* a routine. Many interviewers, especially those who conduct a large number of interviews with the same purpose upon a homogeneous group of candidates, come at length to 'follow' a routine although they have never consciously 'adopted' one. In considering the arguments for and against routine in general, then, we must take due account of these distinctions.

First, then, as regards *planning*.—How far is it desirable that the interviewer should plan the course of each interview beforehand? Many interviewers do so, particularly in

cases where the interview is employed for a special purpose, or for a purpose for which they do not ordinarily conduct interviews. Or the plan may be drawn up in the light of information about the candidate which is already available, and with a view to making the best possible use of it. Planning appears to be made use of principally to facilitate the conduct of the interview in regard to special factors which lie outside the scope of habitual practice. It is useless to ask how far it fulfils this purpose,—a question very similar to that of whether or not a lecturer is assisted by making notes of his lecture beforehand. Not only is the answer very largely dependent upon individual differences, but also these differences are deep-rooted, such particular habits being not easily altered even if it be plainly advantageous that they should be.

We have said that many interviewers, without ever deliberately adopting a routine, come to follow one. This tends naturally to occur when a large number of interviews have to be conducted with the same, or with nearly the same, purpose in view, when time is limited, when the candidates form a homogeneous group (at least in so far as the purpose of the interview is concerned), and when they are of little personal interest to the interviewer. But the tendency to follow a routine may mean either of two very different things. It may merely reflect that economy of action which is an essential feature of skill. In all skilled activities situations which are similar (from the standpoint of the purpose of the activity) are treated similarly; and much that appears as routine in the skilled interviewer's procedure merely results from the similarity of the candidates in relation to the purpose of the interview. Very different, however, is the routine which is really stereotyped activity, pursued independently of differences in the situation, e.g. of the variety of candidates and purposes that has to be dealt with. The danger of

relying upon routine, and of consciously attempting to consolidate a standard practice, is that, once the more *general* aspects of a performance become stereotyped, there is a strong tendency for the more *detailed* aspects to suffer the same fate. A single form of behaviour, fixed to the last detail, tends to emerge,[1] and so to destroy all flexibility. The interviewer who starts by standardising the general topics of his conversation may end with a standardised series of specific questions[2] ill-adapted to the variety of candidates he may have to deal with. There are, then, certain dangers in the *acceptance* of routine, although no exception can be taken to the *existence* of routine in an interviewer's practice where this is but a manifestation of system in a skilled activity.

A number of points, however, are commonly supposed to be in favour of the adoption of a routine in special circumstances. Some of these concern the single interview, others the relation between a number of interviews whether conducted by the same or by different interviewers. It is, for example, often urged that the adoption of a routine will ensure that all relevant topics are covered in the course of the interview. Evidently this is of importance where, in addition to forming a judgment upon the candidate's personal qualities, it is necessary to obtain information from him: an instance of this is provided by the vocational guidance interview. But if

[1] Stereotyping does not, of course, tend to set in under conditions where the success or failure of the performance is more or less immediately indicated. But the failure or success of the interviewer cannot, in the nature of the case, become apparent until some time has elapsed.

[2] I have seen an undoubtedly competent interviewer (in a board interview) fire off a standard series of questions at the candidate. Indeed he read them out of a twopenny note-book. But they were questions on school-work topics, and were intended to provide a series of standard situations for the candidate to react to. They did not form part of a conversation, except in so far as supplementary remarks were interjected to encourage the candidate and to make him justify his answers. The interviewer, in fact, was not in a true sense interviewing the candidate, but conducting a series of experiments upon him.

the sole object of the interview is the assessment of personal qualities, it becomes questionable whether standardisation of the topics to be discussed has not more disadvantages than advantages. The answer must depend upon whether it is possible to claim that some topics are notably more suitable than others for the evocation and evaluation of the candidate's attitudes. We shall consider this question later, but it is perhaps worth noting here that it would seem to be easier to characterise topics as pre-eminently unsuitable than as pre-eminently suitable.

Another advantage claimed for routine[1] is that it enables the interview to be balanced in accordance with the relative importance of each topic in relation to the assessment. This is an extension of the consideration just dealt with; and it is subject to the same criteria. There is, however, a further implication in this point.—In all conversations the course of topics tends to be determined by their natural sequence. And as one topic leads on to another, the whole trend of the encounter may deflect from its main purpose, unless there be some device to prevent this occurring. Such a device can be provided by planning the sequence of topics beforehand. The interviewer is thus able to break off the discussion of a topic as soon as it ceases to contribute to the purpose of the interview. In regard to this advantage of routine, it can only be said that conversation ought to be the servant, not the master, of the interviewer. Automatic switches for turning topics on and off can at best serve only to compensate for faults of interviewing technique which are better cured than compensated for.

A third advantage of routine, it has been suggested, is that by it the interviewer's mind is freed to some extent from

[1] Cf. the evidence given by Miss Spielman (now Mrs. Raphael), of the staff of the National Institute of Industrial Psychology, to the Royal Commission on the Civil Service. *Human Factor*, 1932, vol. 6, pp 209–215.

the task of formulating his questions and considering his next move.[1] He is left more at liberty to observe the candidate's behaviour and to take note of his answers. This suggestion appears to carry with it the implication that the asking of questions and the apprehension of the answers to them are two distinct processes carried on independently of one another. I have tried to show, on the contrary, that in the interview proper this is by no means the case. Each question is, or ought to be, asked in a manner which fits the particular moment at which it is asked; and this fittingness is closely and directly dependent upon the interviewer's apprehension of the candidate's attitude as revealed by his answers. Here again, however, it may well be true that, during the process of acquiring skill in interviewing, it is helpful to divide up the total task in this way, to concentrate upon practising one aspect at a time, and then, when these subsidiary skills have been developed, to try to weave them together into one unified performance. This is, however, a matter for investigation rather than for speculation.

We come now to some suggested advantages of routine which relate to the proper co-ordination of a number of different interviews. In the first place, it may be urged, the use of a routine makes it easier for the interviewer to compare a number of candidates with one another. It is plainly of importance that such a comparison should be possible; for an interviewer may often be called upon to select one candidate from among a very considerable number. But it is questionable whether standardisation of procedure facilitates the comparison. The object of the interview is not to compare the behaviour of the candidates in a certain standard situation, but to compare their personal qualities as determined by

[1] Also urged by the National Institute of Industrial Psychology (see previous footnote).

interview. To obtain comparable assessment of different candidates may demand variation of interviewing procedure.

Containing even more definitely the implication that the interview is in essence a scientific experiment,—the interviewer playing the part both of apparatus and of observer,—is the suggestion that routine will assist a number of interviewers to hold comparable interviews. This suggestion evidently holds good only if the implication be accepted.

The value of routine, then, seems to turn mainly upon one question, whether or not the interview is to be regarded as an experiment in which the candidate is placed in a certain social situation and his reactions are observed. The reasons given in support of the use of routine are ones which are mainly relevant to the first alternative. This is the alternative which I, personally, cannot accept. It is, of course, possible that the controlled observation of the candidate's behaviour in a standardised social situation might afford a better means of assessing his personal qualities than any interview, however well conducted. But this is not a procedure that we are called upon to discuss. It is also possible that good interviewers act according to a routine more frequently than bad ones. But this in itself affords no ground for supposing that the adoption of a routine can improve the bad. As to the advantages which the adoption of routine may confer in the process of acquiring skill in interviewing, this is a question which lies outside the scope of our present discussion.

§ 3

Direct and indirect approaches

A second broad question of 'general strategy' is that of the relative merits of what are often called 'direct' and 'indirect' methods of approach. In this connection we have to distinguish approach to the candidate from approach to

a particular topic. The second of these concerns tactics rather than strategy, and will be discussed later in this chapter.

The question at issue in relation to direct and indirect approach to the candidate may be framed in the following way. —If the object of the interview be purely to assess personal qualities in themselves, then it is plain that all methods of approach are indirect, since the candidate is not asked questions about his own personal qualities. But usually the interviewer's problem is to assess the candidate's personal qualities in relation to requirements of some particular type of situation or kind of work. If the conversation is limited to topics having no direct bearing upon the type of situation in relation to which the candidate is to be assessed, the approach is said to be indirect. So, if a page boy is to be chosen, the direct approach will consist in questioning him about his prospective duties and the implications of these for him. The indirect approach avoids any such reference, conversation being confined to neutral topics, such as football pools and the cinema.

Most of the interviewers whom I have questioned on this subject maintain a middle view, stating that either method may be valuable according to circumstances. A few held strongly that the indirect method should be used wherever possible; while some, evidently regarding such a procedure as serpentine, were inclined to stress the value of frankness and directness. On the whole, I am inclined to think that the exclusive use of the indirect method is rare, most interviewers treating it as an adjunct to the direct which they regard as the normal procedure. We may ask what specific advantages it is supposed to possess. The first of these is that it may be employed to circumvent the special reaction-tendencies which the candidate may, wittingly or unwittingly, have acquired in relation to topics directly relevant to his

work, to the interview-situation and to the possibility of his being selected for the post in question. These special reaction-tendencies may be of various kinds. One candidate may suffer from anxiety in answering questions upon these topics; another may have built up an artificial and more or less stereotyped set of attitudes for use in the interview-situation. In either case it is difficult for the interviewer to reach an adequate assessment. The use of the indirect method has the advantages that anxiety can be calmed by the discussion of topics of neutral significance, and that special attitudinal sets, which may either mislead or obstruct the judgment of the interviewer, need not be called in to play.

In the second place, the discussion of topics with which the candidate is very familiar, such as his work, may have very little penetration-character unless strong interests are aroused. Matter-of-fact questions about conditions of work can generally be answered with ease,—without thought or the display of definite attitudes. If, on the other hand, the direct approach provides access to the candidate's stronger interests and deeper sentiments, its use is clearly valuable.

Even where the chief object of the interview is to obtain information of a personal character from the candidate, the indirect approach may possess advantages. The information that is given in response to any question is always dependent in some degree upon the candidate's apprehension of its implications, and in consequence is often more reliable when given incidentally, rather than in response to a direct question.

It is evidently impossible to come to any simple conclusion upon the relative merits of the direct and indirect methods of approach. To a large extent the degree in which each can usefully be employed by an interviewer is dependent upon his temperament and upon his style of conversation. Some have the capacity so to prepare the way for, and to

frame, their questions that direct inquiries can be made without arousing special attitudes of anxiety or involving preparedness. Others develop more especially the capacity to steer the conversation through a number of neutral topics in a manner which readily permits of a judgment of the candidate's personal qualities. To others, again, it is a matter of little consequence which method of approach is adopted.

§ 4

Topics of conversation

Closely related to the question we have just discussed is the choice of topics. The choice that is made ought, if the view of the essential character of the interview which I have put forward is correct, to be governed by two chief considerations.—The first is that the candidate must be led to a state of mind in which well-defined, symptomatic attitudes can be aroused by conversational stimulation; the second is that conversation must provide such stimulation. In practice other factors inevitably play a considerable part in the choice of topics. The chief of these are the limited amount of time available and the necessity for obtaining within that period information from the candidate. The choice of topics is therefore a matter of compromise. A topic may be broached purely in the interest of immediate tactics. The weather, for instance, is a subject of conversation which is of neutral significance, so far as the object of the interview is concerned, and one upon which most people possess a stock of ready-made remarks. A number of interviewers, however, expressed to me their feeling that the weather is too common-place a subject of conversation to be of use, presumably on the ground that to succeed in maintaining a short conversation about it is so petty an achievement that no increase in self-confidence results.

Some topics are chosen, as we have seen, because information regarding them has to be obtained during the course of the interview. The necessity for this depends, of course, upon how far such information has already been acquired before the interview in the form of letters of recommendation, application forms, etc. But the fact that a topic is broached for this reason does not by any means preclude its simultaneous use for the evocation of attitudes. In fact many of the subjects upon which information is commonly required, such as family, education and previous employment, may be very helpful for this purpose. Among other topics chosen by the interviewer, because they are likely to evoke symptomatic attitudes, are hobbies and spare-time activities. A certain convention governs choice under this last heading; consequently the repertoire of interviewers is in practice somewhat limited. To a considerable extent this is due to the feeling that the circumstances do not justify exploration of many topics having a personal reference. Political and religious beliefs, for instance, are often barred for this reason. Lastly, topics may be raised not because they themselves are useful or significant, but in order to lead indirectly to the discussion of other topics which are.

We ought now to consider more closely the topics which may be chosen in each of these cases. For example, what kinds of topic are especially suited to the process of setting the candidate at his ease? The object of the conversation at this stage is, so to speak, to enable the candidate to find his conversational feet, and thereby to feel more at ease. He will experience an increase of confidence in the measure in which he finds that he is playing a normal and appropriate part in the conversation. Clearly, the topic ought to be one which does not at the outset make any great demands upon his conversational capacity. We may suppose, therefore, that it should concern matters of fact rather than of opinion,—matters of fact which

lie well within the experience of the candidate, not requiring for their discussion any great exercise of thought or memory. In the second place, the topic must not be one the discussion of which is likely either directly or by implication to embarrass the candidate. Thirdly, it is of great assistance to the establishment of *rapport* if this topic be one in which both candidate and interviewer normally have some interest, particularly if they are upon an equal footing in relation to it. A short discussion, for instance, of the deficiencies of transport in wartime (following an inquiry as to whether the candidate found any difficulty in finding his way to the place of meeting) can do much to offset the initial lack of reciprocal relationship between interviewer and candidate. The topic chosen, then, ought to be one which the candidate can easily play his part in discussing. But it ought not, on the other hand, to be too trivial. Unless it provides some slight challenge, its discussion will afford no sense of achievement and consequently no increase in confidence. These are some of the considerations which may affect the choice of a topic at the outset of the interview. But it must be remembered that no mere choice of a suitable topic can do more than assist the business of setting the candidate at his ease. A great deal depends upon the tactics of the interviewer, the way he approaches and develops the conversation, and the attitudes he displays in doing so. These questions we shall consider later in this chapter.

The choice of a topic simply for the purpose of obtaining information requires no further discussion. In the selection of topics suited to the evocation of symptomatic attitudes, we subject the candidate's attitudinal system to a gentle but definite strain, and determine how far he is capable of making novel and adaptive attitudinal reactions. The topics in question, therefore, must be ones around which important sentiments are organised. The most usable of these topics

are generally those which concern the candidate's *interests*. It is in talking of a subject that is of real interest to him that the candidate usually displays most clearly, definitely and spontaneously attitudes which are most immediately related to his personal qualities. One experienced interviewer, in fact, went so far as to say to me that, until the candidate has been brought to speak of some matter that is really of interest to him, it is quite impossible to assess his personal qualities. There are, however, topics other than those which explicitly arouse strong interest, which concern strongly organised sentiments. Of these we may instance the habitual activities of the individual at work and play, and his social relationships both in respect of other individuals and in respect of groups of which he is a member. The attitudes displayed in the discussion of these may be of considerably diagnostic value.

Lastly, as I have already observed, topics are sometimes chosen not for their own sakes, but because they afford the means of approach to other topics. To use a topic in this way is to adopt the indirect method of approach. So varied are the uses of this method in actual practice, and so closely are they bound up with immediate tactics, that it is impossible to state any general rules regarding the suitability of topics for this purpose. The general nature of the method, however, is clear enough.

Before we leave the subject of topics, I must refer briefly to certain general conditions relating to the *order* in which they are best raised. In practice, the order of topics is often largely determined by the amount and nature of the information which is already available to the interviewer at the outset. The topics most relevant to the candidate's employment or to any other purpose of the interview are generally dealt with first; and when these are exhausted, the conversation turns to questions of less immediately practical import,

such as spare-time activities. There is, however, one general condition to which, it is often felt, the order of topics ought to be subject, and this concerns their pleasantness and unpleasantness. It is fairly plain that the interview ought not to start with the discussion of embarrassing topics. And there is no reason to end it upon an unpleasing note. But, as one of the interviewers whom I questioned pointed out, it is important to deal with the unpleasant topics, if any, at the earliest possible opportunity. The consciousness that such topics will have to be raised sooner or later is bound to provoke in the candidate some anxiety detrimental to the proper development of the conversation. My informant said, for instance, that it was her practice, in conducting employment interviews, to raise at the earliest possible moment the question of why the candidate had left his last post, and to continue her questions about his previous career from this point backwards.

§ 5

Special tactics

It is a notable characteristic of psychological problems in general that questions of *content* are more easy to discuss than questions of *function*. Unfortunately it would also seem to be the case that the more exclusively the consideration of a problem ranges about content, the less does the discussion show signs of pointing to any satisfactory solution. To come to grips with a psychological problem we have to try to think in terms of functions; and it is a sad reflection upon the present status of the subject that adequate forms of thought and apt forms of expression for this purpose are so completely lacking. The discussion of the interview-conversation affords no exception to this rule. It is not difficult to analyse and describe conversations in terms of their content—of what is

talked about. But if we do so, we are left with the sense that such an analysis leaves untouched the more fundamental issues of the process. On the other hand, a mere description of the functions involved—of the ways in which the topics are talked about—presents great difficulties; and their analysis even greater. The task, however, has to be attempted, although it will not be possible to do more than make a catalogue of some of the devices by which the interviewer controls the course of the conversation and induces or evokes attitudes in the candidate.

These devices can be broadly divided into two classes. In the first place, it is possible to point to a number of attitudes which the interviewer commonly adopts with a particular immediate purpose in view. In the second, there are a number of more complex manœuvres which cannot be described in terms of the simple adoption of an attitude. In neither of these classes will it be possible to draw up a list which is complete or accurate. The tactics of conversation do not lend themselves to precise description in terms of available categories, nor can we expect to take account of all their variety.

First, then, let us try to lay down the chief instances in which the adoption and expression of an attitude is used tactically. (*a*) The use of *agreement* and *disagreement* with the candidate's expression of opinion or attitude. An attitude of agreement with what a person says is one of the most elementary devices of conversation. Its simplest forms do not involve the use of words, but only a nod or smile. The more elaborate expressions of agreement are verbal, e.g.:—"Yes", "Yes, I agree with that", "Yes, I often feel that too", etc.; and the precise quality of the attitude expressed can be varied almost without limit according to the exact form of words used and the accompanying facial expression and gesture. The most elaborate form is one that may be called 'agreement by amplification'. The interviewer takes up some

remark of the candidate, states it more clearly and fully, draws instances from his own experience to support it, and formulates the whole in such a way as to bring to a focus not only its content but also the attitudes with which it was expressed. The usual purposes of agreement are to induce in the candidate a feeling that what he says is being attended to, understood and appreciated not only in the letter but also in the spirit. It thus serves to lessen the inevitable initial barriers between interviewer and candidate by showing that they can share the same attitudes.

There are, however, other, more subtle, functions of expressing agreement. The chief of these is to test the effect of agreement upon the candidate's attitudinal reactions. The well-adjusted, honest candidate will respond to agreement with a further expression of agreement just in the measure in which the interviewer's attitude reflects his own. If, on the one hand, the interviewer's expression is, for instance, more fulsome than the importance of the occasion warrants, or applies to a set of implications wider than that intended by the candidate, the latter may demur, and so display his honesty. The candidate who is over-sensitive, on the other hand, who lacks self-confidence and independence of mind, or is too stupid to perceive the interviewer's extension of his proposition, will tend to allow 'amplified agreement' to pass unchallenged. At the same time he will often display in his manner the reason for his acquiescence, whether it be lack of intelligence or lack of independence.

Disagreement, no less than agreement, is often employed by the skilled conversationalist, and with a variety of objects. The disagreement may be partial only, the interviewer distinguishing the respects in which he agrees from those in which he differs. One object of partial disagreement is to test the general attitude of the candidate without exposing him to the full strain of total opposition. Such expression of

a difference of opinion, tempered by partial agreement, is often resorted to by an interviewer who feels himself incapable of disagreeing totally without endangering the *rapport* which he has built up. Another use of partial disagreement is to test the candidate's powers of attitudinal discrimination; the interviewer forcing the candidate to react differentially to a situation to which he had previously reacted as a whole.

A further, and especially interesting, purpose of disagreement is that in which it is used as a means of inducing the candidate to adopt a greater independence in the expression of his opinions. In a conversation in which the candidate is clearly maintaining an attitude of polite assent, it is sometimes possible for the interviewer to introduce a greater measure of reality into the proceedings by so framing his disagreement that it carries with it certain implications. These are that the conversation is a *real* conversation, with either side entitled to have his say, and that the interviewer, at any rate, is treating the candidate as a conversational entity to be reckoned with.

(*b*) The expressions of *surprise* and *astonishment* are valuable devices for improving *rapport*. They may also be used, with discretion, to induce the candidate to amplify his views upon a particular topic. In general the expressed attitude of the interviewer is—"Well!—it had certainly never occurred to me in that light before, and I must admit that there is something in your attitude—but my feeling has always been. . . ." The expression of surprise is generally used in conjunction with disagreement. Or it may be combined with humour.

(*c*) *Seriousness and earnestness*. These two attitudes are often displayed with the object of improving *rapport*. When the interviewer's voice takes on an earnest tone, the implication for the candidate is that he is not being merely played

with by the interviewer, but that the latter is really engaged in a conversation with someone whose judgment he respects and before whom he is willing to display opinions with sincerity.

(*d*) *Frankness and recklessness*. With the object, again, of equalising somewhat a conversation which has initially been markedly one-sided, the interviewer may adopt a frankness, and sometimes even a recklessness, in the expression of his views. The implication here is that the candidate, expecting to encounter a grave, superior being of lofty judgment, is pleasantly surprised, and possibly a little shocked, to find a human being who is capable of committing himself to views which are not noticeably profound or even cautious. The general effect is to diminish the formal character of the conversation.

(*e*) The expression of *humour* during the interview is a very complex problem. It is perhaps scarcely too much to say that the success or failure of the interview hangs very largely upon the interviewer's sense of humour and upon the manner in which it is expressed. But I cannot do more than touch upon the whole subject here. We must realise that the expression of humour does not necessarily entail the recounting of jokes or funny stories, or even the adoption of a jocular mode of conversation. Indeed these are more often symptomatic of nervousness than humanity; and they subject the candidate to the continuous strain of deciding whether and when he should laugh, and with what heartiness. It is difficult precisely to describe the expression of humour in the absence of jocularity. An essential feature is certainly interest, combined with absence of moral judgment; but this is only one element of the whole attitude.

The humorous attitude of an individual is always directed upon some object. Some of the commoner objects are himself, the person to whom he is talking, other persons and

groups of persons, or more particularly their attitudes and beliefs, and social institutions. The chief dangers in the expression of humour, so far as the interview is concerned, arise when the candidate believes, rightly or wrongly, that the humorous attitude of the interviewer is directed upon the candidate himself, upon a group of persons of which he is in fact a member, upon the attitudes and beliefs of such a group, or upon social institutions of which he approves or to which he is party. The dangers inherent in allowing such beliefs to enter the candidate's mind are clear; yet the skilful conversationalist can often turn them to advantage. When the talk has reached a certain state of intimacy, the interviewer may deliberately adopt an amused attitude towards the candidate and his attitudes, and even on occasion towards some of the other objects mentioned above (although this is less common, the reaction of the candidate being less calculable). In doing this, the interviewer is making use of a common feature of social intercourse in general—the tendency to make superficial explicit disunity or conflict the means of expressing implicit bonds of unity or more intimate modes of relationship which cannot be directly manifested. The implication is always—"We could not say these things to one another,—display these attitudes towards one another,—if we were strangers." It is scarcely necessary to point out that the correct timing of such a manœuvre as this is of the utmost importance.

A further instance of the use of humour in the interview is that in which the interviewer causes the candidate to adopt a humorous attitude jointly with him towards some third person or thing. The object of this, again, is to create a bond of union between candidate and interviewer.

(*f*) The part played in social intercourse by attitudes of *sympathy* and their expression is complex, largely because of a frequent and characteristic lack of connection between the

outward display of sympathy, on the one hand, and the feelings and intentions that inspire that display, on the other. In consequence, we have to distinguish the conventional outer display from an attitude of restrained and tolerant but active interest which often conveys to the individual upon whom it is directed a stronger and more lasting sense of sympathy. Sympathy, in this latter sense,—in the sense in which the physician is sympathetic towards his patient—is indispensable to effective interviewing. Conventionally sympathetic behaviour, on the other hand, is of strictly limited utility. With certain types of candidate it may be used to increase the flow of spontaneous utterance, where this is desired. Conversely, and perhaps of more practical significance, the absolute inhibition of all conventional signs of sympathy may prove effective in bringing an uncontrollably voluble candidate to a stop, even when all else has failed.

(*g*) The expression of *interest*, and the simulation of *lack of interest*, are both devices which are frequently used, not only as means of controlling and adjusting the course of the conversation, but also as attitudinal stimuli.

(*h*) The purpose of *informality* has already been discussed,[1] together with the conditions in which it can be appropriately employed. The use of *formality* is a little more subtle. It can often be employed with advantage to soothe a nervous, sensitive candidate. The essence of its effect is to provide the candidate with a definite framework of appropriate behaviour, and so to free him from the strain of having continually to adjust his manner to that of the interviewer.

(*i*) Lastly, we may notice a device, very commonly employed in ordinary conversation, which may sometimes be appropriately utilised in the interview after the relationship

[1] See page 63.

between interviewer and candidate has reached a certain stage of intimacy. This consists in affecting to misunderstand what the other party to the conversation has just said, while at the same time revealing clearly that this misunderstanding is wilful and purely rhetorical in function. The ramifications of this trick are complicated and cannot be discussed here; but it generally provokes a symptomatic response.

§ 6

General tactics

The more extended manœuvres that may be employed in the interview are too many and various, and too dependent upon the individual sensibilities and capacities of interviewers, for any exhaustive account of them to be given here. The following points are, however, perhaps worthy of note.

Often very significant for the conduct of the interview are *changes* of topic, attitude, and *tempo*. A train of conversation pursued without variety of tempo and change of topic tends to become stagnant; and 'steerage way' is thus lost. But the mere maintenance of the conversation is not the only purpose to which a varied *tempo* is put. Much may be learnt about the candidate by observing the way in which he responds to changes of *tempo* in the encounter generally. Somewhat abrupt changes of attitude, particularly in the liveliness of the interviewer's manner, especially if accentuated by a change of posture, may alter the whole character of the encounter, causing the candidate to display quite fresh evidence of his personal qualities.

In relation to *tempo*, it is worth noting that *pauses* in the conversation can be very significant. Badly chosen, they may easily break the trend of the relationship which is being built up. On the other hand, if well chosen, they may contribute markedly to the success of the interview. Disastrous are

those pauses which the candidate cannot fail to realise are involuntary,—manifestly caused by the interviewer being at a loss how to proceed. Their effect is not simply a loss of prestige for the interviewer: they produce a sense of embarrassment and insecurity which affects interviewer and candidate alike.

One special form of manœuvre which merits attention is the 'trick' question. Such questions may be of the following kinds.—

(1) The purely intellectual type, designed to show quickness of thought especially in arithmetical or logical connections.

(2) The intellectual type with a 'catch' in it. These are designed to test quickness of thought, and the power of not being confused by mere apparent complexity in a situation.

(3) The practical type, designed to test qualities of ready common-sense, power of planning, and 'gumption'.

(4) The question, whether intellectual or moral, to which there is one obvious answer which is incorrect, and another, less obvious, correct one. Its object is to determine whether the candidate is able to keep watch for complexity amid apparent simplicity, and to look beyond the immediate situation.

(5) The type of question which is designed to test the consistency and soundness of the candidate's moral attitudes by causing him to display them unwittingly. This does not involve the presentation of a single question, but the candidate is asked a question such as "Do you approve of the thirty-mile-an-hour limit in built-up areas?" and is then caused, by further questioning, to justify whatever answer he has given. In the course of such justification he will often display attitudes upon general moral issues.

(6) The type of problem in which a moral dilemma is

presented to the candidate, and he is asked what he would do if he were actually faced with it.

There are clearly not only advantages but also dangers in the use of such manœuvres as these: some interviewers, indeed, regard them as being unfair to the candidate. Much depends upon the way in which the 'trick' question is used.

'Trick' questions are often used in a less explicit fashion than is suggested by any classification such as that given above. Many people in conversation delight in so framing their remarks that a slight trap is laid for the other party. Some are scarcely aware of such habits in themselves. Others are habitually ready to perceive them in others, sometimes without justification.

Chapter VI

OBSERVATION AND ASSESSMENT

§ 1

Introductory

WE HAVE now to consider the manner in which the candidate's behaviour, verbal and other, is observed by the interviewer, gives rise to an apprehension of his personality, and finally results in the expression of judgments regarding his personal characteristics. It will be helpful if we recall briefly the general theoretical account of these processes as suggested in Chapters II and III. There we concluded that the observation of the candidate's attitudes resulted in the growth and continuously increased articulation of a general schematic picture of his personality in the interviewer's mind. This picture is to be regarded primarily as something latent or implicit. It exists in as much as (*a*) the interviewer acquires greater facility and certainty in dealing with the candidate as an individual, and therefore, in a functional sense, can be said increasingly to know him; and (*b*) at any given moment it is possible for the interviewer to evoke, on the basis of this general, schematic picture, actual judgments about the candidate. Such judgments, as I pointed out, may take a number of different forms. They may be represented only by the occurrence in consciousness of a particular cognitively-toned attitude towards the candidate, or in a specific act of imagining his reactions to an imaginary concrete situation. Or they may take the form of an actually formulated expression of his personality, or of attributions of personal quality.

In this chapter I shall try to fill out and correct this general theoretical *aperçu*, both by discussing the questions at issue more thoroughly, and by making use of the information which has been given me by experienced interviewers regarding their own observations of the processes at work. There is, however, one proviso to be made before we embark upon this discussion. I have throughout insisted upon the important part played by *attitudes* in the apprehension of an individual's personality. It may well seem that theoretical consistency would demand that we tried to frame the contents of this chapter in such terms that the more intimate mechanics of this mediation by attitudes became clear. We ought, perhaps, first to discuss the processes of observing attitudes, and secondly to indicate the way in which these observations go to build up the schematic picture. In fact, however, our discussion will be compelled to proceed at a more descriptive, less interpretative level. I shall consider, in the first place, the chief types of data which appear to play a part in the assessment and, in the second, the stages by which the schematic picture becomes built up. But although we shall try throughout to keep in mind the attitudes which we suppose to intervene between these two phases, it will be impossible to work out in detail the part they play.

A word or two in explanation of this back-sliding from theoretical commitments may be in place. The first difficulty that arises when we seek to describe the precise part played by attitudes arises from their exceptionally elusive character as phenomena. They are elusive as subject-matter for introspection and description; and they are elusive as events standing in causal relations to other events. The first of these circumstances renders the collection of information about them, particularly from persons unversed in the arts of introspection and description, very difficult. Most of the interviewers from whom I sought information were persons

of considerable intelligence, many of culture too. But it was plain to me that any effort to press my inquiries beyond questions relating to the *kinds* of data employed in assessment and the *stages* by which the assessment developed would only result in misunderstanding and confusion for which I alone would have been to blame.

The first broad question I want to consider is that of the relative importance which is attached to the *matter* and to the *manner* of the candidate's remarks. Secondly, I shall deal with the significance of the *non-verbal* aspects of his behaviour and bearing. I shall then turn to the details of the *formation of the schematic picture*, considering the tendency for a 'first impression' to be formed, and then the stages by which this is modified or rejected in favour of a more complete apprehension. In this connection we shall have to discuss the manner in which, during the formation of the schematic picture, there emerge *judgments* of a more or less definite character, and the effects which these may have upon the course of the interview. Lastly, we shall have to try to analyse the process whereby the schematic picture is utilised in the *formulation* and *expression of judgments* about the candidate and his personal qualities.

§ 2

Matter and manner

By the *matter* of a candidate's remark I mean the effective meaningful proposition conveyed by it to the interviewer. But this proposition may be expressed in a number of different ways,—with varying degrees of qualification and emphasis, and with various different pre-suppositions and implications of context. All these contribute to what may be called its *manner*, which for the present purposes we may take as embracing the following elements:—(1) the degree

in which the remark in question is qualified or limited in its intended application; (2) the amount of certainty with which it is expressed; (3) the amount of clarity with which it is expressed; (4) the interest or vivacity displayed in tone of voice, gesture, speed of utterance, forcefulness of intonation or accent, considered in relation to what is normal to the individual's manner as a whole; (5) the actual choice of words, whether simple or pedantic, and the complexity of grammatical and syntactical structure employed. We may also conveniently include among the elements making up manner; (6) the degree in which the remark in question is relevant to the conversation at the point at which it is made.

Before we actually consider the contributions which 'matter' and 'manner' may make to the assessment, it is important to make clear the relationship of this distinction to that which we considered in Chapter III between outward behaviour or response and the attitude which that behaviour or response betrayed. The latter is not to be supposed equivalent to matter, nor is manner to be equated with attitude. The attitude is betrayed both in manner and in matter; and the outward behaviour or response is coextensive with manner and matter taken together.

Matter, then, as well as manner, may be of significance in the perception of the candidate's attitudes. But its importance is plainly dependent upon the kind of questions asked by the interviewer. If these questions are of a purely factual import, demanding and obtaining only the answers 'Yes', 'No', or a statement of fact, then matter affords no indication of attitude towards the topic under discussion or towards the interviewer. Even in such replies, however, the manner may be of considerable diagnostic importance. In practice, for reasons that I have already mentioned, many of the questions asked in the interview are of this type; and if these questions are to be utilised in the interests of diagnosis,

reliance must largely be placed upon manner. But there are questions other than those of purely factual import, that is to say other than those whose import is independent of the process of answering them. The candidate may, for instance, be asked by question to give verbal expression to attitudes that he has never previously formulated in words, or to justify an attitude that he has displayed in the manner of his previous replies. In such a case, his response is doubly indicative of an attitude, and in both of its aspects is of diagnostic significance.

Consequently, while the matter of the reply is expressive of an attitude, the precise value of such an expression and the degree in which it can be treated by the interviewer as veridical are dependent upon the introspective sensibility and skill in formulation exhibited by the candidate. And while the manner of the response is also expressive of an attitude, this is not the attitude which the candidate is engaged in expounding verbally. It is rather an attitude (*a*) towards himself and his efforts to introspect and formulate, (*b*) towards the interviewer who has urged him to undertake the formulation, and, in general, (*c*) towards the whole situation in which such formulation is demanded. Because the expression of attitude in the manner of response in such a case is less witting, it may often be of greater diagnostic significance than that afforded in the matter of the response.

It would appear, in fact, that, generally speaking, more can be learned from the manner than from the matter of the candidate's remarks; and this conclusion is, on the whole, supported by the opinions expressed by most of the interviewers whom I have questioned on this subject. Before, however, we pass on to the fuller consideration of manner, there is a further aspect of matter which should not pass unnoticed. I have spoken, perhaps too abruptly, of responses as if they fell into two classes,—those of factual, and those

of attitudinal, import. In practice the candidate's contribution is not, or ought not to be, confined to the answering of questions. The value of the interview is, as I have suggested, greatly dependent upon the extent to which the candidate can be induced to converse spontaneously, and without too much regard to a course imposed by question and answer. In doing so he will be in part responsible for the choice of topics, if not by deliberate introduction at least in so far as topics may intrude which were not chosen by the interviewer. Here, it was suggested by one psychologist whom I questioned,[1] lies a further opportunity for the use of *matter* as a basis for personality judgment. The observation of the type of topic which tends to intrude at times when the initiative is allowed to fall into the hands of the candidate may afford valuable clues to his personal qualities, more especially to his basic interests. Very often the significant feature of the conversation is not the intrusion of a fresh topic, but a tendency for emphasis to be laid upon one aspect of a topic which is already being discussed.

In attempting to evaluate the diagnostic significance of *manner*, it is important in the first place to emphasise one general precaution. This may be framed as follows.—Elements of manner possess diagnostic significance only when considered in relation to the cultural, social and educational background of both interviewer and candidate. This principle, which in itself may appear self-evident, has a somewhat complex basis. In the first place, a manner displayed by the candidate may be one which is in fact merely derived from the normal practice of his social group, and as such can afford no indication of his individual characteristics. In

[1] The person in question is not a psychiatrist, but made the suggestion chiefly in relation to the discovery of 'abnormalities' of personality and temperament, particularly in regard to the detection of undue systematisation of ideas.

the interviewer's social group, on the other hand, this same element of manner may, by reason of its departure from normal practice, be regarded as potentially symptomatic of a particular personal characteristic, manifesting itself in the reaction of the individual to his social environment. In this way, by failing to relate elements of manner to their proper context, the interviewer may take for significant something which is not. In the second place, these conditions may be reversed: the interviewer may fail to perceive elements of manner which in fact are of diagnostic value. Thirdly, it is necessary that elements of manner should be apprehended in the light of what is normal to the relationship subsisting between interviewer and candidate, having regard to their different ages, social, educational and cultural backgrounds, and the special circumstances of the interview itself. It is hardly necessary to add that this complex precautionary principle is not consciously applied to the evaluation of each perceived element of manner displayed by the candidate. To state the principle is only to formulate some of the psychological conditions which must operate when a competent interviewer uses the elements of manner in arriving at a just assessment.

I have distinguished, provisionally, six different elements of manner; but it is clear that in being observed and utilised manner is not treated piecemeal. It is perceived as a 'pattern'; and as a pattern it is active, on the one hand, in effecting apprehension of the candidate's attitude and, on the other, in provoking an attitude in the interviewer. Nevertheless, upon different occasions, in different interviewers and in regard to different candidates, the relative preponderance of the different features of this pattern may vary. With candidates of a low intellectual and educational status, for instance, clarity and relevance of manner may be of little significance, while with candidates of a higher grade these

elements may be of considerable importance in the apprehension of their attitudes. Again, which features of the pattern of manner are significant will largely depend upon the topic which is under discussion. Everyone draws conclusions in regard to an individual who is vivacious, confident and downright in discussing his future but becomes evasive, lifeless and uneasy when questions concerning his past are asked.

In view of this dependence of the significant elements of manner upon circumstances, it is clearly impossible to make any more specific statement regarding the diagnostic value of the manner exhibited in an individual's remarks. But it is my personal impression that the apprehension of manner generally plays a far greater part in the interview than interviewers are aware or would ordinarily admit. And it may be that this factor could play an even larger rôle, were not the interviewer's attention frequently occupied in recording the factual information which he must so often obtain from the candidate.

§ 3

Non-verbal clues

We next have to consider the significance of *non-verbal* clues in assessment. Among these I shall include for convenience qualities of the voice, although these in part belong more properly to manner. The rôle which these non-verbal features of the candidate's behaviour may play is twofold. On the one hand, they certainly enter into the apprehension of attitudes. On the other, some of them are often treated as affording direct evidence regarding personal qualities. We may consider these clues under the following headings,—(1) morphological characteristics of the candidate, (2) dynamic and static aspects of posture and movement (including gesture), (3) facial expression, (3) vocal qualities and (4) miscellaneous, including habits of dress, general tidiness

of appearance and such special features as bitten finger-nails. Of these, posture and movement, facial expression and vocal qualities have each to be considered in two aspects,—the first relating to what appears characteristic of the candidate in general, and the second to momentary or short-term manifestations occurring at particular points in the interview. Of an individual's facial expression, for instance, we may say that it is gloomy, implying that this is its habitual character. But we may also say that, at the mention of a particular topic, it lit up. It is clear that these particular events are perceived against the background provided by the habitual state, and possess significance only in relation to it. They effect the apprehension of attitudes, whereas the habitual characteristics themselves are treated as characters of the individual and, along with the morphological, are often believed to be associated with personal qualities of a mental kind.

The part played by these non-verbal clues is thus twofold, although in practice the interviewer generally does not treat them independently. The distinction is, however, important in connection with a common tendency to believe that certain bodily characteristics, whether morphological or habitual, are invariably associated with certain personal qualities. Such beliefs range from the popular connection of red hair with uncertainty of temper to the formalised typologies of Kretschmer and others. Where they exist, their importance and effectiveness in determining attitudes usually bear little relation to the evidence which supports them. Their significance for the interview is twofold.—In the first place, they may operate to produce actual judgments of personal quality, or at least to modify judgments made on other grounds. In this there is little danger, for most interviewers with practice find small difficulty in discounting or compensating for their personal tendencies in such directions. Indeed, some interviewers have spoken to me of the pre-

cautions which they are compelled to take against over-compensation. But these beliefs may work in a more insidious way. It is easier to discount a tendency of belief in the making of a judgment than to prevent its operation in the display of attitudes by the interviewer. The existence of such tendencies may therefore seriously disturb the interviewer's power of conducting the interview. His whole approach to the candidate may be flavoured by feelings of dislike or active liking, of repulsion or attraction, of which he may well be aware, but which he is unable to correct. Some interviewers have told me that in such cases they may find it necessary to delegate their task to some other person.

By the dynamic and static aspects of posture and movement I mean the whole range of phenomena relating to the bodily manifestation of a person, except those of permanent morphological character and of facial expression and vocal quality. It should be remembered that the apprehension of these characteristics is by no means confined to the visual mode of perception. The expression is intended to cover gait, stance, habitual posture in the commoner circumstances of life (such as sitting, standing and walking), gesture and movement of the limbs in general. In addition, it may conveniently include stereotyped individual habits, fidgets and tics and handedness.

The clues which these characteristics provide are not, it seems, consciously made use of to any great extent. How far they are unwittingly perceived and contribute to the general picture of the candidate's personality it is difficult to determine. But in so far as they are deliberately attended to, their use appears to be determined by individual habit. One interviewer will pay special attention to the posture of the lower limbs, another to quickness of walk, a third to habitual attitudes and movements of the hands.

It is difficult to avoid the belief that facial expression must play a large and important part, not only in making judgments about personality, but also in the perception of attitudes. Here again I found it difficult to obtain any detailed account of the use to which these clues are put. One may presume that they enter into the general setting within which other types of data are more consciously attended to.

The characteristics of the human voice, and their significance for the apprehension of attitudes and the assessment of personal qualities, are subjects which it is impossible to discuss at length here. In so far as the direct relationship of the qualities of voice to personality is concerned, much effort has been expended in investigating the basis and validity of judgments so made, although it cannot be said that much is yet known of this matter. As to the opinions of experienced interviewers, those which I have obtained in my inquiries are more positive and explicit than in the case of other non-verbal clues; they are various in their nature, some interviewers maintaining that voice judgments were dangerous, others that they paid no attention to vocal qualities, and yet others believing that vocal qualities are of great importance in assessment.

In general, it seemed to be the feeling of those whom I have questioned about non-verbal clues that they are of subsidiary importance, and are useful only as a help in forming a general impression. Another aspect of the part they may play in the interview generally was pointed out to me by one individual who maintained that it is just these characteristics of behaviour which are most likely to provoke unreasoning likes and dislikes. Some people, for instance, find it difficult to tolerate a harsh voice, others regard a husky voice as especially, though irrationally, attractive. Some are so distressed by a 'fishy' hand that their capacity for

effective social intercourse with its possessor is seriously reduced.

§ 4
The first impression

We must now try to treat the processes of observation and assessment in a more chronological sense. The sequence of events is, I have suggested, broadly divisible into three phases,—first, the formation of some kind of a general impression of the candidate; secondly, the development, modification and fuller articulation of the picture; and thirdly, the extraction of judgments from it. The first question we have to consider, then, is the nature of this 'first impression', and the bases of its formation.

When the candidate enters the room, the interviewer obtains some kind of immediate impression of him. Whether this impression is justified, whether it is accurate, is not at present the question. In some sense or other it is there, if only in that it brings about the adoption by the interviewer of a particular attitude towards the candidate in the opening phases of the interview. It may, on the other hand, take a very much more vivid and clear-cut form.

What do we mean by the term 'first impression', and what are the various forms in which it may occur? The first part of this question is difficult to answer in psychological terms. Certainly the first impression is a cognitive event, but one which is characterised especially by complexity of psychological level. In one form it may be dominated by items of an explicitly perceptual nature; in another its chief feature may consist in an awareness of attitudinal or affective reaction towards the candidate. The interviewer, in fact, may, on the other hand, become chiefly aware of a purple tie or, on the other, of a vague feeling that he dislikes the candidate on sight. The first impression, then, may be characterised by

being at once an impression of the candidate and of the interviewer's own reaction to him,—one in which the predominant element may belong to any of a number of different types of awareness from the direct visual to the affectively-toned intuitive. Whatever its character in this respect, however, it is immediate, certainly incomplete and probably false in part. We shall shortly try to distinguish some of the elements that may go to make it up.

In the second place, it is characteristic of the first impression that it may be stable and persistent in a degree which often appears to be out of keeping with the length and nature of that part of the encounter which gave rise to it. It may remain, sometimes in a recognisably compulsive form, when further evidence regarding the candidate thoroughly belies it. To such an extent is this sometimes the case that the interviewer may be constrained to make the most vigorous conscious efforts to discount it.

As to the forms which the first impression may take, my inquiries among interviewers have indicated, as might have been expected, that these are varied. But of the elements which *may* enter into its constitution, we may distinguish the following.—(1) An active suspension of judgment, sometimes deliberately imposed, sometimes spontaneously aroused by the situation in a cautious interviewer. (2) An awareness of certain purely external features of the candidate, presented vividly and dominantly. The fact that he is wearing a flower in his buttonhole or that he has a slight limp may stand out particularly among a host of other details which remain in the background. It is clear that certain features may thus become dominant by reason of their strangeness or incongruity, and may therefore tend to occupy an important place in the first impression obtained by *any* interviewer. But other features may be picked out by the individual interviewer's own interests or by his own predilections. So the

eye of one interviewer may wander to the candidate's hands, that of another to his tie, while the ear of a third is captured by his voice. (3) An immediate feeling of like or dislike and, connected with this, a tendency for the formation of spontaneous judgments of a quasi-ethical character regarding the candidate's personality. (4) Judgments of a predictive character relating to the candidate's future either in general or in a restricted sphere. Such judgments are of the form "He will never get on in the world", or "she will make a good shorthand-typist". (5) Lastly, but from the standpoint of the conduct of the interview perhaps of the greatest importance, is a sense of knowing how to deal with the candidate,—of perceiving the proper attitude to adopt towards him.

It is true, I think, to say that all of these elements may be present in the first impression, and that the variety of forms in which it is found is due to the relative predominance of each element in the total impression. And it is clear that these elements, although verbally distinguishable, are not psychologically independent variables. In practice, first impressions appear to belong to one or the other of two more or less opposed types. The first is vivid and tends to be compulsive. It tends to be dominated by purely perceptual data and may have a strong affective flavour. If there is suspension of judgment, this is deliberately imposed rather than unwitting; and there may be some conflict between this tendency and incipient judgments attributing this or that personal or character quality to the candidate. Prediction relates to some limited sphere. The sense of being able to deal with the candidate may be weak or lacking. In short, this form of the first impression consists in a vivid apprehension of the more manifest characteristics of the candidate, together with an affective reaction towards him. In the second form of first impression, there may be little of an immediate

perceptual character. The attitudes aroused in the interviewer are of a less affective, more intellectual character, with little tendency for quasi-ethical judgment and little sense of like or dislike. The suspension of judgment is unwitting rather than deliberate, and a sense of knowing how to deal with the candidate may be predominant. The predictive aspect, if present, tends to be of a general rather than a specific nature.

To present the matter in this abrupt fashion may suggest a cruder opposition of the two types than is in fact justified. All that I have wished to do has been to characterise the extreme cases between which concrete instances lie. There is no warrant, in the description of these types, for any immediate judgment regarding their relative merits, i.e. of their relative fitness to contribute to a successful interview. It is clear, of course, that a first impression of the vivid, emotionally-toned type may, if it be stable and persistent, seriously interfere with a just assessment. But the practised interviewer who is subject to this kind of first impression is generally alive to its dangers, and is able to discount it where necessary. The second type of first impression, on the other hand, may be associated with a tendency for continued suspension of judgment, and a disinclination to frame any determinate picture of the candidate's personality. The final assessment reached may consequently be anaemic and of little practical value. But it must not be forgotten that in either type the first impression is, at most, a starting-point. The total picture which the interviewer possesses at the end of the interview is essentially different from that at the outset. Even though the explicit, conscious part of that picture remains unchanged in form and content, there is at the end of the interview a substratum of potential judgment which could not in the nature of the case have existed at the beginning.

§ 5

The formation of judgment

We have next to consider some of the stages by which the interviewer's apprehension of the candidate's personality develops throughout the course of the interview. We shall perhaps be in a better position to describe these changes if first we consider the nature of the 'impression' which the interviewer gains of the candidate's personality as a result of the interview. Instead of inquiring directly into the nature of this impression, however, I would prefer to ask the following question. In what ways is the *interviewer* altered as a result of the interview? In what respects is *he* a different individual at the end? In the first place, he possesses a set of reaction- and attitude-tendencies in regard to the candidate which he did not possess before. These constitute a new special skill in dealing with a particular person. In the second place, if he again encounters the candidate, either in the flesh or in imagination or as the subject of conversation with a third party, he is encountering an object with which he is to a greater or less extent familiar, which presents itself to him as something possessing certain properties of which he is implicitly aware, and which he could formulate if required. In the third place, he is now in a position to make specific judgments about the candidate, framed in terms of categories of which he knows the meaning. That is to say he can answer specific questions about the candidate, if these are asked either by some other person or by himself. The question we have to try to decide, therefore, is "in what form does the candidate become apprehended by the interviewer, having regard to the part which such apprehension subsequently plays in the latter's behaviour?"

It is clear that such a question can expect no more than a tentative answer. The answer I would like to suggest is this.—

The interviewer after the interview (and in general any person after an encounter with another) possesses and carries about with him a kind of 'homunculus'-like representation of the candidate. This model is essentially a 'working model', a 'living image'; and when occasion demands, it can, so to speak, be taken out of its box and made to perform. It is by placing this creature in imagined circumstances, and by watching its behaviour, that the interviewer is enabled to make predictions about the candidate's probable behaviour in those circumstances. It is this homunculus that the interviewer contemplates when he is asked questions about the candidate, or when he seeks to give a description of him. And it is this homunculus that is weighed and measured in terms of intelligence, reliability, honesty, etc., when the interviewer makes a formal assessment of the candidate's personal qualities. It is, in fact, to the homunculus that the interviewer tends more and more to react in general.

It may perhaps be felt that such a notion as this is no more than an elaborate, far-fetched, means of giving expression to the peculiar kind of integration which our impressions of other people acquire. But the homunculus theory will fulfil a valuable purpose if it serves to make clear the following points.—(1) The impressions we get of a person, which, psychologically, bring about the formation of the set of reaction-tendencies we describe by saying that we 'know' him, are *from the outset* impressions of him *as an active organism*. However limited and however sketchy the homunculus may be in the early stages of acquaintance with its human counterpart, it is essentially a 'going concern'. The impressions which go to build it up are not ones of static characteristics, but of modes of activity not reducible to a succession of momentary qualities. The homunculus is not constructed as a corpse in the first instance, and later infused with the breath of life. (2) The psychological process by

which judgments about a person are arrived at essentially involves the intermediate stage of the formation of some kind of generalised dynamic representation of him.

If some such view as this regarding the form in which we acquire and preserve 'knowledge' of other people is, at least hypothetically, acceptable, certain consequences must be noticed.—The first concerns the processes of observation in the interview. It follows from our theory that what is most vivid and most clearly grasped perceptually may not be the most effective and significant in the construction of the homunculus. For in perception we tend to apprehend most clearly those aspects of a thing which are most clearly and simply defined. Thus single, easily described, details stand out against the less easily grasped pattern of which they are part; or conversely, the pattern, if it be simple and definite, may take precedence over the details. In the same way simple events tend to emerge dominant over the whole process which is vaguely perceived as a background of change. Now, as I have pointed out, those impressions of the candidate are essentially impressions of him as an *active* organism. I suggested, in fact, in Chapter II that they are his *attitudes*. And, being somewhat elusive, ill-defined processes, they tend to be perceived as part of the background against which other, simpler and more definite features insistently appear. It would seem, in fact, that much that is most important from the point of view of the formation of the interviewer's assessment takes place *outside* the focus of his attention during the interview.[1] This is certainly borne out by the

[1] I should like to point out that the question raised here of the importance of 'background' processes is one whose significance is by no means confined to this particular instance. It arises in many cases in which the individual is becoming familiar with a particular type of material or situation. One notable instance is provided by the process of becoming familiar with a town. While this process is going on, one's attention is constantly occupied with specific objects. Yet when familiarity

fact that interviewers find it exceedingly difficult to give any coherent account of the stages by which their assessment becomes formed.

At the risk of tedium, it may be as well to recapitulate the main outline of the view we have reached. This may be described as follows.—(1) The impressions which are significant for the formation of the interviewer's apprehension of the candidate are chiefly impressions of kinds of activities, that is to say of attitudes; (2) these impressions progressively, and independently of the interviewer's immediate conscious volition, build up something in the nature of a dynamic image, or homunculus-like representation, of the candidate; (3) the candidate's attitudes are perceived mainly in the background of perceptual consciousness; (4) it follows that the content of the interviewer's conscious processes revealed by introspection affords little material for a detailed account of the sequence of events by which the assessment is arrived at.

Such a view, of course, cannot pretend to suggest more than the very broad outline of what takes place. And there are certain respects in which it requires immediate amplification and correction. In the first place, the more explicit conscious processes themselves require some description. Secondly, we must consider the relationship between the unwitting processes by which the homunculus becomes built up and the witting, directed activity of the interviewer. The skilled interviewer does not conduct the conversation in haphazard fashion: it is in part his growing apprehension of the candidate that prompts him to this move or that. Thirdly, certain special conditions apply to the construction of the homunculus which we have not yet considered. These are concerned with the pre-existing generalised schemes of

has developed, one is left with a generalised image of the town, many features of which can only have been presented as the background against which the specific objects were attended to.

reference which supply, so to speak, the framework for its construction.

First, then, let us consider the more explicit aspects of the interviewer's conscious processes. Their content is clearly complex, embracing a number of items which are experienced in varying degrees of clarity. Chief among these items is, evidently, the mental apprehension of the candidate by the interviewer. At any given moment the candidate is presented in the interviewer's consciousness only in *some limited aspect*. Indeed, at the outset, this aspect must be a very limited one: the candidate may appear to the interviewer chiefly as an untidy boy with nasty purple socks. Later, the dominant aspect may be the candidate's reaction to the topic which is being discussed. But at no time can the interviewer's *total* apprehension of the candidate be presented in consciousness. The picture is always of the candidate, but it is one in which the emphasis is continually shifting from one aspect to another. Yet in the meantime a permanent total apprehension is being progressively built up outside consciousness.

This series of dynamic images is not without its effect upon the content of consciousness. The succession of pictures of special aspects of the candidate is therefore subject to an orderly mode of change, in that, while they remain pictures of special aspects, the candidate who is thus presented is something which progressively becomes more and more familiar to the interviewer. It is, I think, in some such way as this that we must envisage the sequence of conscious processes, from the first impression as the candidate enters the room to the last glance as he leaves it. This sequence of changes was aptly characterised by one interviewer, who compared it to those which she experienced as she gazed at a picture by Corot. My first impression, she said, is that of a hazy, ill-differentiated mass. Within this, details emerge, in

some places more clearly than in others. A portion which has become highly articulated may again become obscured. But the final result is usually a clearer picture than that seen at the outset.

Another important feature of the conscious processes is the tendency for more or less clearly formulated *judgments* about the candidate to emerge. Every now and then the process of observation is broken into, and a 'judgment' is either deliberately made or involuntarily enters consciousness. The emergence of these judgments often appear to arise from the crystallisation of an attitude towards the candidate. What has been vaguely felt about the candidate may become more or less explicitly formulated. Now it is, I believe, the constant play of such attitudes, which are intrinsically judgmental in character, that determines the interviewer's conduct of the conversation; and it is in this sense that observation and a growing apprehension of the candidate regulate the steps that the interviewer takes. Thus the interaction between observation and conversational tactics ought not to be conceived in terms of specific formulated judgments being made upon the basis of particular observations, followed by a decision to turn the conversation in a certain direction with a view to testing those judgments. We ought rather to regard the interviewer's attitudes as being induced by his growing apprehension of the candidate. These attitudes imply judgment, although such judgment, in order to become effective, need not become formulated. It is these attitudes which themselves steer the conversation.

Lastly, we have to consider briefly certain special aspects of the construction of the homunculus. It would, I think, be incorrect to suppose that this process occurs of itself *ab initio*. We all possess certain generalised 'frames of reference' in regard to which other people are assessed; and it is fairly plain that to a greater or less extent these are involved

not only in making judgments about the completed homunculus, but also in its construction. That is to say, there exist for each individual ready-made skeletons upon which the homunculi are built, and into which the impressions of their human counterparts are fitted. This process represents our tendency to assimilate people to *types*. It has the advantage of reducing the time required for the building of the homunculus. But if the number of such standard skeletons is severely limited, this also possesses certain obvious disadvantages.

There is one special extension of this principle which is worth notice in connection with the interview for purposes of vocational selection. Where the object of the interview is limited to the choice of a candidate who possesses the specific personal qualities which are required for the post in question, it is the practice of some interviewers to keep in mind the picture of a model candidate who possesses these qualities, and to compare the actual candidates with this model. In terms of our theory this procedure amounts to the construction of an *ideal* homunculus and to comparing the *actual* homunculi with it. The process of judgment is thus reduced to one of simple matching.

§ 6

Judgment and its expression

Lastly, we have to consider the assessment itself and the means of its expression. The nature of judgment itself has been already considered in Chapter III, where, it will be remembered, we decided, for present purposes, to regard judgment as essentially involving the interaction of a 'concept-schema' with an 'object-schema' (page 45). In this chapter I have suggested that the object-schema in question is the homunculus-like representation of the candidate which is spontaneously constructed in the course of the interview.

I have suggested also that it is only through the formation of the homunculus that the candidate as a person can be judged. We have now to consider the forms which the assessment may take.

Broadly speaking, assessments may be divided into two types when they are openly expressed. On the one hand, the interviewer may attempt to describe the candidate in the form of continuous prose,—to provide a character-sketch or 'pen-picture' of him. On the other, he may make specific judgments about him in terms of previously selected concepts. These two procedures involve different psychological processes.

The processes involved in the construction of a character-sketch are extremely complicated, raising problems connected with language and thinking which are quite outside the scope of this book. As I showed in Chapter I, a character sketch is not simply a succession of judgments of a simple character; and I reviewed there some of the devices commonly employed where straight-forward adjectival description will not serve. By contrast, the process of judgment in regard to a single category is simple. It consists in applying virtually a measuring-rod to the homunculus and in recording the result. In many cases the personal quality in question is not treated as being susceptible of degrees, but only in relation to its presence or absence. Then the process of judgment is simpler still, but *it remains one of reaction between the concept-schema and the homunculus*. It is true that even such simple judgments as these may entail very considerable mental effort, and may finally emerge without any sense of certainty, or may even fail to emerge at all. This, I think, is not to be attributed to any complexity in the process of judgment itself, but to the inadequacies of the concept-schema.

So far as the relative merits of these two methods of expressing an assessment are concerned, a choice will depend

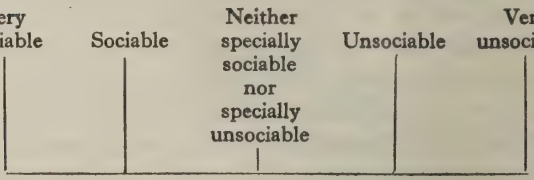
largely upon the purpose in hand. The assessment may either serve chiefly as a record for the interviewer himself, or it may be definitely intended to convey to some other person the candidate's personal qualities. In either case, however, the main problem is that of insuring that there is a basis of comparison between different candidates, while allowing a sufficient flexibility of terms to make possible the proper description of each individual. Those interviewers, for instance, who advocate a standard list of qualities (and in addition, in some cases, the assessment of the candidate on some formal rating-scale[1] in respect of each quality), do so with the intention of providing a standard basis of comparison. Those who advocate no system of standardised

[1] A rating-scale is a scale of prefixed degrees of determinable quality in respect of which an individual is to be assessed. Thus a scale of *sociability* might be set up in any of the following forms:—

(1) Degrees of sociability 1 2 3 4 5

(2) Degrees of sociability .. .. −2 −1 0 +1 +2

(3)



The assessment of each individual is recorded in this form.

The rating-scale is, thus, a device for impressing quantitative form upon qualitative judgments, and its justification is statistical, depending upon a general tendency of judgment within the field of application. The conditions in which it can be validly employed are somewhat complex and cannot be discussed here. A good account may be found in the chapter by Dr. Philip Vernon on "Rating-Scales, Inventories and Questionnaires" in *The Study of Society* (Ed. Bartlett *et al.* London: Kegan Paul. 1939).

assessment, but instead a 'pen-picture' of each candidate, are concerned to insure that small but significant differences between candidates may be adequately represented in the written record. These finer points of difference demand, it is felt, the fullest use of all available linguistic resources. Indeed, one interviewer, concerned with candidates for higher industrial and administrative posts, told me that he was even prepared to risk misunderstandings through the use of language sufficiently vivid for his purpose.

The question of whether the advantages of the pen-picture outweigh those of the standard inventory, or whether some combination of the two may not afford the most adequate means for the expression of judgment, is one which requires empirical investigation.

The use of the rating-scale and inventory requires that the same meaning shall be attached to the terms by a number of different people. It is of course true that the same consideration applies to the pen-picture method. But the difficulty is in this case not so great. For the terms used in a pen-picture are set in contexts, which serve to sharpen their meaning; and the definitive character of an inventory confers greater power of *mis*leading those who use it. How far it is really possible for a number of people to attach meanings sufficiently similar for practical purposes to the terms in common use in inventories is somewhat doubtful.[1]

The conditions attaching to rating-scales in their statistical aspect are too well-known to require discussion here. But there are certain psychological questions connected with their use which merit investigation. Some individuals are able to

[1] In an attempt (Cf. *J. Ment. Sci.*, 1939, vol. 83, pp. 245–255) which I made to put this matter to the test by asking for definitions of terms commonly used, it appeared that, among psychologists, very various meanings were attached to the words *reliability* and *sociability*. But it is not certain that this test is a fair one. The limitation of the experiment to psychologists was also perhaps unfortunate!

make judgments with a high degree of consistency on one kind of scale; whereas others using the same scale are not only inconsistent, but may even be unable to make any judgment at all. Some interviewers have told me that they are in the habit of using simple scales of three points, others only attempt a rating in special circumstances, while others said that they could not use a scale at all. It may well be that the capacity to cast a judgment into terms so specific that a formal comparison with that of others can be made is possessed only by some individuals. For others the attempt may disrupt and degrade the process of judgment itself. In spite of the manifest advantages they possess, caution is necessary in advocating the universal employment of rating scales.

Chapter VII

THE BOARD INTERVIEW

§ 1

Introductory

THE INTERVIEWING board is an institution with which controversialists have lately much occupied themselves, not always with due respect for the variety of different grounds upon which it may be attacked and defended. The board interview is more than a special technique for the judgment of human quality and attainment. It is at present a social institution with roots extensive and closely intertwined with those of other practices, customs and devices of wide significance. For this reason it would be foolish to seek the justification for its existence, the nature of its shortcomings and the possibilities of its improvement, solely in terms proper to the description of those of its psychological features which are relevant to its positive outcome. Its whole effective value and its significance are not to be assessed only by reference to its technical appropriateness. At the same time, like all other social devices, it must ultimately be judged in accordance with the degree in which it is found to fulfil its primary purpose. This is, in general, one involving the assessment of personal qualities and capacities.

It is not my intention in this chapter to embark upon any attempt to analyse in psychological terms the processes essential to the board interview. The board itself constitutes an instance of the small social group; and perhaps no questions in social psychology are more difficult of approach than

those connected with the behaviour of such groups, both in themselves and in encounters with other small groups and with single individuals. These problems cannot be tackled here. In this chapter I shall simply try to outline some of the considerations relating to the board interview which interviewers have raised in my conversations with them.

§ 2

The survival of the board interview

Tradition and the crystallisation of the mechanism of administration are undoubtedly responsible to a large extent for the continued existence of many interviewing boards. In addition, the apportionment of ultimate responsibility is a cardinal principle of social organisation in this country. This principle requires that the appointment of individuals to important posts shall be effected, in form at least, by a body of persons, although in fact the actual choice of the individual may be delegated to one. The board interview, therefore, survives as a formality. As one person put it, 'One does not like to be party to the filling of an important position without having a look at the man'.

In the second place, it is widely believed, and probably with justice, that an accurate assessment of an individual's personal qualities and mental attainments cannot be reached by his encounter with a single person, if the qualities be subtle and the attainments considerable. This may especially be the case where it is desired to examine his knowledge and attitude of mind over a wide range of subjects. The board is a means of arranging conveniently a meeting of the candidate with a number of persons, and of sparing him the strain of a number of meetings. In addition, it is often felt to be desirable to determine whether he can display his knowledge of, and exercise his judgment upon, a num-

ber of topics on a single occasion. This is regarded as evidence that his mental equipment is truly ingrained and has not been acquired by over-night cramming.

Among other factors making for the perpetuation of the board interview is the existence of a tendency, not always absent in the exalted persons who form interviewing boards, to utilise the situation as an exercise in personal display, the rest of the board and the candidate providing a suitable audience. "The great problem of the board interview", said one psychologist, "is to prevent each member of the board from treating the others as part of the subject of the interview."

§ 3

Objections to the board interview

The opinion is widely held that the board interview is in general an undesirable institution. But the reasons offered in support of this opinion are not always very explicit. One of the chief general objections lies in the unavoidably alarming nature of the situation in which the candidate is placed. However nervous he may be at the outset of an interview with a single individual, he will almost inevitably be more so when faced with a number of individuals. And whatever arts may be at the disposal of the single interviewer to restore him to a more normal state of mind, these are with greater difficulty exercised in the presence of others. If the candidate makes a slip and becomes aware of it, its effect is magnified out of all proportion to the number of those who perceive it.

A further general ground for objecting to the board interview is its 'artificiality', although it is somewhat difficult to state clearly in what this consists and how it is detrimental to the proceedings of the board. Probably the chief factor for the members of the board is a sense of unjustified yet ines-

capable formality, sometimes amounting to a feeling of being ridiculous. Each member is aware that his resources are being constrained and hampered by circumstances which are in some measure contingent and superfluous. The nervous candidate is less likely to be affected by the artificiality of the situation as such: it is a situation real enough to him. Yet even he may sense something of its effect upon his interviewers, and his behaviour may accordingly be modified. The net result is that the whole encounter is one in which the behaviour of the parties to it may be deflected from its normal course, and in a somewhat unpredictable fashion. The development of social relations may be frustrated; the interviewers, because of the presence of their colleagues, may be unable to adopt attitudes essential to the effective conduct of the interview; and the candidate may remain throughout in a state of mind wholly unsuited to his accurate assessment.

Other objections to the board interview concern the mutual relationships of the members of the board. The board may, it is often said, be entirely dominated by one of its members, either because the rest cannot help it, or because the interview is a mere formality providing insufficient motive for the exercise of individuality. But the part played by the dominant member of a small social group is by no means single or simple. Pure dominance, in the sense that one individual forces his opinions upon a number of others who at the outset think differently, and continue to do so once they are freed from his immediate influence, is an uncommon phenomenon. Dominance in the sense that opinions honestly held at the conclusion are, as a matter of fact, chiefly the product of what the dominant member has said is less rare; and it may or may not indicate a state of affairs which is inexpedient from the point of view of the functions of the group. The 'good committee-man' is not always a tyrant: often he is an individual who possesses in a

high degree the power of estimating more rapidly and precisely than his colleagues what the outcome of a discussion between them will be, and of assisting them to reach this conclusion. We ought therefore to beware of supposing that the apparent domination of an interviewing board by one of its members is necessarily detrimental to its function.

Where there is no dominance there may instead be a mutual antagonism of its members, and consequently some difficulty in reaching a truly communal decision. A clash of honestly upheld interests can arise; for the board may be constituted with a view to insuring the adequate representation of a number of different groups, departments or institutions, in whatever steps may have to be taken. Or, on the other hand, there may be personal antagonisms arising from encounters between the members outside the interview situation. If the board method of interviewing must be employed, these factors ought all to be kept in mind.

A further source of objection lies in the relation of the board interview to written examinations impersonally administered. This question is often raised especially in connection with the choice of candidates for the Civil Service, where it is the practice to allot marks to the candidates for his interview. These marks count in with marks given for written examination papers, and the selection of candidates is made upon the aggregate. The view has been expressed that the interview may give room for the introduction of a number of biases in assessment, especially those of class and personal prejudice. The question, in so far as it concerns the Civil Service, has been discussed in a spirited though from the psychological point of view not very illuminating, fashion by Stuart-Bunning and others.[1]

There appears, therefore, to be widespread dissatisfaction

[1] Public Administration (*Journal of the Institute of Public Administration*). 1937, vol. 15, pp. 305–337, 433–440.

with the board method in general and much doubt regarding its credentials. Though somewhat inarticulate, this is probably well-founded. But the fact remains that at present the board interview is well-established by convention. And although there are cases in which it might with advantage be dispensed with, the grounds upon which this might be done are not likely to be psychological.

§ 4

Advantages of the board interview

If there are objections to the board interview, it has also its advantages. The board may, for instance, be used to select a person for a post in which the general qualities of address, poise, capacity to be articulate in the presence of an audience and so forth are required. Even where these qualities do not come into question, an audience may assist some candidates to display their personal assets.

More immediately related to the processes of assessment is the consideration that the board method allows the two processes of stimulation and observation to be carried out separately and by different individuals. It is often difficult for a single person to attend both to the asking of questions and to the appreciation of the significance of the answers. This sharing of effort in the board interview may be a factor of no small significance where the list of candidates is long. At the end of a heavy day's interviewing an interviewer may become fatigued and suffer from temporary lapses of attention. The presence of several interviewers diminishes the risk of vital points being missed and of promising lines of conversation being prematurely closed.

Another advantage that may be claimed for the board interview rests upon the absolute necessity of making contact with the candidate. One individual is able to make contact

with others in varying degrees of closeness, in accordance with his and their personal qualities. The several members of a board, if they are of varied temperament, may be supposed in this respect to cover a wider range of candidates than would be possible for the single interviewer. It may be doubted, however, whether this apparent advantage is not offset by the fact that gifts of establishing human contact are not most easily exercised in the presence of others.

On the whole, it is difficult to perceive any strong grounds either for absolute condemnation or for unqualified praise of the board interview. The discussion of this question is in any case somewhat academic. The interviewing board, like many social institutions which have their bad as well as their good points, is well-established. Questions of more practical significance arise when we consider what conditions are most favourable to its success.

§ 5

Size and constitution of the board

While the use *par excellence* of the board method is in vocational selection, there is so great a variety both of actual requirements and of contingent conditions that the factors favourable to success may differ largely in different cases. Here it will only be possible to consider questions sufficiently general in nature to apply to all boards.

The first and most obvious question to ask about the board is "How big should it be?" In considering this question we must take notice of a distinction between the 'large' and the 'small' board. If a board is small enough to form a true conversational group, it differs in some not easily definable but fairly distinct way from the board which forms an audience. Evidently the property of being a small board does not

depend on numbers alone, but also upon the physical disposition, mental attitude, and even the auditory acuity, of its members. In general, however, it may be said that the tendency for a group to form a 'large' board increases rapidly as the number of its members rises above five. Each of these types of board may be supposed to have its uses, although there is a general feeling, I think, that the large board is more often *mis*used than the small, being often employed unjustifiably for purposes that would better be effected by the small board,—or by a single interviewer. Similarly it is often felt that the small board, having no special advantages over the individual interviewer, might well consist of one member only!

The large board is often used for reasons unconnected with the question of insuring the optimum conditions of assessment. The number of its members is generally determined in accordance with some factor independent of its interviewing functions. A number of interests may have to be represented, or the 'board' may in fact be a committee possessing many other functions than that of choosing employees. The actual number of members in a large board is, however, somewhat immaterial. Once a group is large enough to acquire the properties of an audience, it will be treated as such by the candidate. But it is very important that the board should, unambiguously, possess the properties either of a large or of a small group. The candidate ought to be spared the difficulty of trying to react to two different situations at the same time or in rapid succession.

In so far as the small board is concerned, the number of members must be considered in relation to various factors. These will include—the type of procedure adopted both in the interview itself and in the subsequent discussion of each candidate; the amount of time that can be given to the interviewing and discussion of each case; and, in certain cases, the

number of different special aspects from which the candidate must be considered. The procedure adopted and the duration of time allowed to each case are obviously interdependent factors. In some boards the procedure is more or less informal, each member breaking in on the conversation as and when he wishes. In others the members take it strictly in turn to converse with the candidate, and no member interrupts a colleague. Procedures intermediate between these two are possible. The advantages of the first type lie in the easy atmosphere that can be developed and in the full exploitation of conversational possibilities that it allows. Its disadvantage lies in the possibility of the conversation 'going astray', time thus being wasted. The second type ensures that, formally at least, the procedure can be standardised and all candidates can, nominally, be treated alike. Each member of the board obtains as full an opportunity as possible of making contact with the candidate, and time is not wasted. But the proceedings are apt to be somewhat formal, and to the candidate overawing. Though time is not so apt to be wasted as in the less formal method, the time required for the whole proceedings may be considerable, since there is little opportunity for elastic adjustment of each interview according to the nature of each candidate. But, whichever method be adopted, the chief problem is that of the length of time which is needed for each member of the board who wishes to converse with the candidate, to develop a topic of conversation sufficiently far for it to possess diagnostic significance. If time is short and each member of the board wishes to have his say, there will be a tendency for a number of incomplete conversations to take place. These, even taken together, may fail to provide a proper basis for assessment. Generally speaking, it is perhaps reasonable to set a minimum of a quarter of an hour as the average duration for each interview by a board of four or five members for any purpose

except the purely formal one of ratifying an appointment previously made in effect.

The choice of members will depend usually upon a number of special factors. But the following general principles ought to be kept in mind.—The personal relations of the members should be such that true discussion and the achievement of a really communal decision are possible. To this end it would be important to reject people who, in a harmful way, habitually try to dominate any functional social group in which they find themselves. Those of merely obstructive propensities and those too retiring to play any real part in communal function ought also not to be chosen. On the positive side, it is evidently desirable to have represented on a board a range of human experience in keeping with its purposes. This principle may sometimes be found to conflict with the attempt to ensure the possibility of discussion and communal decision.

§ 6

Discussion and formation of judgment in the board interview

Besides interviewing the candidate, it is also the task of the board to arrive at some decision about his personal qualities. And this process raises fresh problems, some of which have already been subject to empirical investigation.[1] The chief general questions at issue are, briefly, the following.—"How far does the process of discussion amount to a creative synthesis of the opinions of the individual members of the boards? How far does it lead to the mere establishment and formulation of a 'mean' of these opinions? And how far does it involve positive suppression of the opinions of some

[1] By the International Institute Examinations Enquiry. Cf. P. Hartog and E. G. Rhodes. *An Examination of Examinations*. London: Macmillan. 1935.

and dominance of those of others?" These questions need lengthier discussion than we can give to them here. But, briefly, opinion is divided along the following lines.—Some, acutely concerned at the danger that members of a board may be unduly influenced in their decision by the expressed opinion of their colleagues, advocate that before any discussion takes place each member should write down his judgment in some form or another. On the other hand, there are those who have faith in, and attribute value to, the principle of communal decision reached by free discussion. These consider that the attempt to discount the influences of members one upon another by requiring independent judgment of each is either useless or a negation of the principal purpose of the board interview, as opposed to the single interview.

The use of independent judgments, recorded before discussion, was a feature of the experiment in interviewing made by the International Institute Examinations Enquiry. In this investigation the board interview was made to resemble as closely as possible in all its features that which forms a part of the examination for entrance to the Civil Service (Higher Grades). The candidates were, however, examined by two separate boards. The following is extracted from the instructions given to the examiners:—

"(*e*) The following procedure will be adopted in regard to the recording of marks.

As soon as the *viva voce* examination of the candidate is over, *and before any discussion of his merits has taken place*, the Chairman will ask each of the examiners to write down his mark on the mark-sheet. The Chairman will then ask the other examiners to state the marks so written down, and will finally state his own marks so that each member of the board may know what marks have been allotted in the first instance by the several members of the Board and be able to record them on his own mark-sheet; a discussion will then take place on the different marks proposed and the Chairman will record

a mark representing the view of the Board as a whole, this mark being obtained either by agreement, or if that is impracticable, by taking an average of the marks allotted by the several examiners."

The results of this experiment were interesting. The number of candidates was sixteen. The candidate placed first by Board I was placed thirteenth by Board II. The candidate placed first by Board II was placed eleventh by Board I. The coefficient of correlation between the marks assigned by the two boards was + 0·41. If the experiment can be accepted as providing any hint of the real results of the interview in the Civil Service Entrance Examination, these facts are obviously disquieting. But our immediate interest lies in the value of the technique employed after each interview. This consisted in pre-marking, discussion, and subsequent re-valuation. The effect of the discussion does not appear to have been appreciable. The correlation between the marks *finally* allotted by the two boards is, as I have said, + 0·41. If we calculate the value of the coefficient for the average of the marks *initially* allotted, *before* discussion, to each candidate, we obtain a value of + 0·43. The degree of agreement between the two boards, which is in this experiment taken as an indication of the reliability of the board interview method, was, therefore, not perceptibly altered by the discussion. Indeed we must conclude that, in the circumstances of this particular experiment, the discussion was of no significance whatever.[1]

[1] This does not in itself, of course, mean that the discussion did not improve the judgments of the boards regarding the merits of the candidates. For it is evidently possible for the two boards to agree to the extent of $r = +0{\cdot}41$ upon a large number of different placings of the candidates, some of which will correspond better than others to their true merits. But, so far as the experiment is concerned, agreement between the two boards is the only available criterion of the correctness of their judgment.

The results, then, of this experiment *seem* to indicate that, in board interview proceedings such as these in question, discussion of the merits of the candidate merely amounts to a somewhat clumsy method of averaging the individual judgments of the members. It would follow that the discussion might as well be replaced by the speedier process of averaging individual independent marks. But it may be that some factor in the particular circumstances of the experiment prejudiced the discussion. That there is some truth in this is suggested by the very failure of the board to reach more complete agreement. One is unwilling to believe that the interview by such boards is so haphazard a procedure as appears from the results of the experiment.

One possibility is that the very business of pre-marking prejudiced the subsequent discussion.[1] It may well be that an essential feature of effective discussion is a suspension of judgment on the part of at least some members of the board. At all events, the assumption that the dynamics of discussion in such circumstances consist only in the statement of individual views and their subsequent modification is one which is not self-evidently true. That in a certain measure (which in all probability is different in different individuals), there is *some* form of judgment present in the mind of each individual examiner before the discussion, can scarcely be doubted. But there is little reason to suppose it desirable to force these implicit judgments to the point of articulation demanded by the ascription of a mark. It is quite possible that effective discussion requires that each examiner shall *not* have formulated his judgment to this extent.

Lastly, we may suggest that it is a somewhat limited view of the process of character judgment to suppose that the most reliable and independent judgments are those formed

[1] One of the interviewers who took part in the experiment suggested this to me.

without reference to the effect produced by the candidate upon persons other than the judge himself. The reactions of third parties frequently form part of the material upon which every-day judgments are formed. The *use* of other peoples' judgments is quite distinct from their *acceptance*.

Upon the function of discussion in the board interview, therefore, no positive conclusion can as yet be reached. The situation in which this discussion takes place is one of a wide class of occasions on which a number of individuals reach a communal conclusion or decision by conversation. It is scarcely possible to characterise the process in terms more specific than these. Its mechanics constitute a subject for future psychological investigation.

§ 7
Multiple interviews

In the last resort, it may be felt, the interviewing board affords a means of eliminating those sources of error which arise owing to individual differences of judgment. The question arises whether this advantage is not better secured by a number of single interviews by different interviewers. If the candidate is seen in turn by a number of people, all the advantages which the single interview may possess are retained, the functions of discussion, if any, can remain, while the dangers of trusting to the judgment of a single individual are eliminated.

If this method be adopted, however, it seems plain that the advantage arising from the mere *haphazard* multiplication of judges is small by comparison with that obtainable if they are chosen *deliberately*. It is desirable, for instance, that they should represent a variety of human types in respect of their temperament, outlook and experience. But mere variety is not sufficient. They must be complementary to one another

in these respects, be capable of co-operation based upon their complementary qualities, possess a language in common, and be conscious of a single common aim. If these conditions are not fulfilled, the advantages arising from the subjection of the candidate to a number of encounters become reduced to those belonging to any simple multiplication of cases. And these, in the present instance, are dubious to say the least of it. The number of judges that it is possible to employ can scarcely be large enough to form a truly random sample.

Chapter VIII

CONCLUSIONS

§ 1

Shortcomings of psychological discussions

TO MANY reasonable-minded people the perusal of a psychological discussion is apt to bring a sense of irritation or of disappointment, intensified by a consciousness, vivid rather than precise, of the existence of real and vital problems awaiting solution. Ill-founded, over-hasty, conclusions arouse irritation; efforts made towards preliminary abstraction seem too often to impose unreality and neglect of what is urgent or conspicuous. Caution, on the other hand, appears to be inseparable from excessive qualification of statement; and the weight of downright conclusion is disappointing by comparison with the volume of its protective wrapping. The fact is, and it is well to face it, that psychological investigation, at any rate of social phenomena, must for the present consist very largely in the process of manœuvring for position. And the details of this necessary activity are often tedious and uninspiring.

Accordingly, I venture to hope that those who have read so far will restrain that part of their disappointment which results from the lack of positive conclusions. At this stage of our knowledge the prime object of discussion must be to stimulate thought. Those whose business it is to conduct interviews could render invaluable service to their art if they would reflect upon the methods they use, give expression to their views, and try to perceive clearly the

psychological implications and conditions of what comes to their notice. It is with this chiefly in mind that I have embarked upon this essay.

§ 2

Summary of conclusions

What, then, briefly summarised, is the upshot of this discussion so far as it has been carried? It amounts, I think, to the following conclusions.—*First:* the interview must be regarded not as something *sui generis* to be treated in isolation, but as the purposeful utilisation, in special form and circumstances, of activities and processes common to other social phenomena. The use of conversation, the expression, arousal and perception of attitudes, the formation of judgments, the favourable disposition of circumstance,—all go to make up the interview; and each is a common feature of social life. Skill in the conduct of the interview lies in the use of each and in the combination of all in the manner best suited to the purpose in hand. It is possible, therefore, that, in so far as deliberate investigation is concerned, these several factors may best be studied in manifestations other than the interview itself. It is at least reasonable to remark that each of them demands investigation upon its own account, and that the proper statement of the special problems of the interview must, within certain limits, await the results of this.

Second: the attempt to describe and to analyse the essential mechanism of the interview depends upon the choice of suitable basic terms. Two conditions ought so far as possible to be satisfied by these.—They must offer the possibility of simple description over as wide a field as possible. And they must be rooted in empirical fact, not merely connected with it by an uncertain chain of conceptual links. I have advanced the view that the notion of *attitudes* at present best satisfies

these conditions, and that it is these, rather than specific units of actual behaviour, that provide the most suitable coinage for discussion and thought about the interview.

Third: in so far as preliminary inspection allows any valid division of processes within the interview to be made, this lies between those of *stimulation* and *judgment*. In other words, it is the task of the interviewer in the first place to *arouse* by conversational and other means *the display of attitudes* by the candidate, and in the second place to *effect a judgment of the personal qualities* of the candidate upon this basis. The actual process of arousing attitudes must usually be preceded and accompanied by manœuvres devoted to restoring normal mobility of attitude to the candidate, who will have lost this in the 'setting' of the interview. These manœuvres again are chiefly conversational in nature. The processes of observation and judgment are not to be analysed into a set of independent acts of cognition, coupled with a distinct process of forming judgments by logical means upon the basis of what is cognised. Already in the process of observation there is essentially involved the implicit form of judgment, the existence of which brings about selection and organisation of the immediately given data. Adequate observation and sound judgment depend upon the proper cultivation of these pre-existing schemes of judgment. And this, in turn, depends in considerable measure upon the development of a communicable body of reliable knowledge regarding the structure and organisation of personality in general. Moreover, this knowledge must be made available in a form in which it can be assimilated into, and utilised by, the 'schemata' upon which observation and judgment depend. However accurate and far-reaching it may be, it will be useless to the interviewer, if it exist only in a form which demands explicit logical processes for its utilisation.

Fourth: conversation consists not primarily in the exchange

of formulated ideas or of information. It is, first and foremost, a game played directly in terms of *attitudes*; and the use to which it is put in the interview can be properly appreciated only in these terms. The art of conversation is one which from time to time waxes and wanes, like other arts, in accordance with a number of social factors. It is possible that its potentialities have as yet been by no means fully exploited, as regards both the assessment of character and the adjustment of mental disorder. Although it is possible to formulate some of the gambits and devices used in present day conversation, the attempt to determine and to state its general principles has hardly yet begun.

Fifth: in the development of a body of knowledge regarding the structure of personality, particularly in the assimilation of this into the active dispositions which underlie observation and judgment, linguistic factors play a considerable part. Progress must depend upon the existence of an adequate language in which these topics may be discussed and thought about. Every effort ought to be made to improve our linguistic resources in this respect.

Sixth: in addition to the essential processes of the interview itself, account ought to be taken of a number of conditions relating to its general circumstances and setting. These, although they cannot in themselves assure success, can stand in the way of it. They concern such questions as those of the material setting of the interview, the taking of notes, the individual character of the interviewer, the choice of members of a board, and so forth.

§ 3

Some practical suggestions

My especial aim in discussing the essentials of the interview in more or less psychological language, has been not so

much to arrive at practical suggestions or recommendations as to induce a spirit of inquiry among interviewers. Nevertheless, it will be worthwhile tentatively to translate some of the considerations with which we have been concerned into propositions of practical import. In doing so I shall for the sake of brevity be dogmatic; but dogmatism must not be mistaken for the claim to ultimate correctness.—

(1) The would-be interviewer, in whatever capacity he is employed and for whatever purpose his interviews are conducted, must take every opportunity of cultivating the art of human relations in general. It is not sufficient to make a particular study of those types of individuals with whom he is especially brought into professional contact. Moreover, the skills which are developed by this means must be maintained in a state of continued liveliness and readiness. These skills are extremely high-grade, and are proportionately subject to deterioration through disuse.

(2) A properly assimilated, functionally active, 'knowledge of human nature' must be developed by every possible means. Much is acquired concurrently with the effort to become skilful in the conduct of human relations. More can be learnt from the classics of literature. Even the perusal of works upon psychology is not to be despised, provided that these are taken for what they are,—namely the statement of *interim* results of scientific investigation, and not as collections of cut-and-dried results competing with common-sense. The acid test of whether or not knowledge has been properly assimilated and is functionally active lies in the feelings experienced when it is utilised in a social reaction. If a sensation of conflict or of strain be experienced, then assimilation has not fully taken place.

(3) An introspective habit of mind must be cultivated, and the interviewer must gain practice in perceiving the changes in his own attitude, not only with a view to gaining precise

control over them, but also because an understanding of them will sharpen his apprehension of attitudes and their changes in others.

(4) The interview itself must be embarked upon with a sense of its functional unity. It must be regarded, not as an occasion for a series of unorganised disjointed observations and judgments without any particular beginning or end, but as a campaign with a definite objective. Without this attitude the full resources of the interviewer cannot be mobilised; the failure of one kind of tactics will not readily lead to the adoption of another; and the power of judgment will dissolve, leaving only an ineffective set of consciously fabricated 'conclusions'.

(5) During the interview, the interviewer ought to think and act in terms of *attitudes*. This injunction applies especially to the process of acquiring skill in interviewing. Experimental psychology has produced much evidence that the learning of a skill is in very large measure dependent upon correctness in the *immediate intent* of the learner,—in the immediate direction of his conscious processes. Sudden rapid progress may often follow an alteration in immediate intent. Anyone who has learnt to play a game will be aware of the importance of these facts. The injunctions "Keep your eye on the ball: don't bother about the way you are hitting it", and "Don't worry about throwing the dart: try to hit the bull", are instances. Similarly there is advice for the interviewer:—"Never mind *what* the candidate says: notice the *way* he says it", "Don't try to make the *correct remark*: think instead of the *appropriate attitude* to take up, and a suitable form of words will be forthcoming".

(6) Sound judgment of character, of personal qualities, and of suitability for an occupation cannot be reached by any conscious process dissociated from observation and the conduct of conversation. The way of improvement lies in the

refinement and articulation of impressions that *emerge*, not in any attempt to set up a rival business of deliberate judgment upon a new conscious basis. An objective judgment, based upon 'facts' and not upon 'biased' impressions, is the aim. This aim cannot be fulfilled by discarding the powers of judgment with which we are endowed, but only by improving them.

(7) The mere attempt to formulate and to express judgments of character in terms which are formally 'scientific' will not necessarily ensure the most adequate communication of judgments to others. The use of scientific language depends upon the existence of a system of precise and interconnected concepts within the field in question. But in the field of character and personality this does not exist. We have therefore to fall back upon the resources of 'ordinary' language, and in some of these there are dangers. Words and phrases which are vivid are often those most likely to be misunderstood and most dependent for their precise significance upon individual sensibility. Practice in the use of language is therefore another duty of the interviewer, and this has a twofold value, inasmuch as it will not only increase his power of communicating his judgments to others, but will also refine and articulate the power of judgment itself.

§ 4

Interviewing as an art

If interviewing is an art, the lines along which improvement may be sought can best be imagined by considering those by which other arts have been governed. In music, painting and the drama we find in varying degrees the gradual growth of a body of agreed, communicable technique and method. Additions and improvements occur, in part by the accumulation of experience, in part by the absorption of

knowledge gained in other fields, and sometimes by deliberate effort. There are times when preoccupation with technique threatens true achievement. There are others when the stream of traditional method runs thin and weak. The occasion may even arise when, for certain purposes, the practice of an art is abandoned and its functions are taken over by mechanical devices—when the gramophone is substituted for musical execution, pictorial representation is given over to the camera, and the film deputises for the drama. These are all possibilities inherent in the development of the art of interviewing. But for the present, as a special branch of the general art of conducting human relations, it lacks all but the beginnings of an agreed explicit technique. As this begins to emerge, the results may be surprising. And in its formation a scientific psychology will have a large part to play.

Chapter IX

RECENT VIEWS ON THE INTERVIEW

§ 1

Introduction

THE LATE WAR placed fresh emphasis on the importance and the limitations of the Interview, especially in respect of its use in Personnel Selection. Many people with little or no previous experience found themselves committed to a routine of interviewing, and there was little time or opportunity for training them in their work. To others, experience was a handicap when imported into circumstances which rendered its effects inappropriate. The shortcomings of poorly conducted interviews became baldly manifest in figures of "training wastage."

At the same time, the indispensability of the interview as a method of selection was, in a number of cases, re-emphasised against a background of enormously expanded use of tests and psychological methods generally. Happily this had the consequence of bringing the interview under the observation and attention of trained psychologists, and a few of these have recorded their views and proposals. It is to be hoped that more will do so. The object of this chapter is to summarise some of these contributions. They deal especially with the following topics:—

(1) What the Interviewer should look for.

(2) How to conduct the Interview.

(3) The use of multiple interviews in vocational guidance, and their proper inter-relation.

(4) The necessity for, and methods of, training interviewers.

(5) Psychological conditions affecting the reliability of the Interview.

§ 2

What the Interviewer should look for

Dr. N. A. B. Wilson,[1] discussing the use of the Interview in selecting candidates for specialised technical duties, is insistent that the interviewer must keep clearly in mind his objectives—what he wants to find out about the candidate. It is the clear consciousness of these, and their steady pursuit, that confers organised structure on the interview, and guides the procedure of the interviewer. His list of objectives need not, he says, be dealt with in any particular order, but he thinks it appropriate to consider first the *acceptability* of the candidate to the group within which he will have to work if selected. Especially in dealing with service personnel—Wilson writes with his experience of the Navy in mind—this is clearly a matter of importance. But this point has, perhaps, further significance. Such an assessment amounts to making a complex psychological judgment—chiefly in respect of temperamental qualities—by using the characteristics of a special type of social group as a concrete criterion. And it might well turn out that judgments made in terms of such criteria are both easier to make and more reliable than those which use more abstractly conceived and

[1] Wilson, N. A. B: "Interviewing Candidates for Technical Appointments or Training". *Occupational Psychology*, 1945, XIX, pp. 161–179. Dr. Wilson will be publishing his views on "Interviewing for Positions of Authority" shortly in *Occupational Psychology*.

defined psychological qualities, such as 'sociability' or 'gregariousness.' Methods of this kind, in which the interviewer attempts only the assessment of the candidate's probable behaviour in a series of defined concrete situations, might, properly validated statistically, afford a fresh approach to the estimation of temperament.

Wilson's next objective is the assessment of *effective intelligence*, and in discussing this he urges that the interviewer use a nicely graded series of question which will 'stretch' the candidate without overstraining him. Dealing with means of exploring *interests*, he stresses, as does Mr. Misselbrook,[1] the usefulness to the interviewer of acquiring some familiarity with the spare-time pursuits of the type of candidate he is dealing with. A digested, if superficial, acquaintance with the technicalities of aeronautics and wireless will, for instance, go a long way in helping to deal with young people of the male sex. Dr. Alice Heim[2] also emphasises the importance of *discussing* interests—their mere enumeration is not enough. Indeed, it is scarcely too much to say that to permit candidates merely to state that they have such and such interests or spare-time pursuits is to invite deceit. On the question of *motivation* and its strength and 'goodness,' Wilson is inclined to suggest that estimates should be based on evidence about the candidate's past history as elicited in the interview. While such evidence is obviously weighty by comparison with the relatively superficial impressions an unskilled interviewer may directly obtain, it might, taken alone, be misleading. Persistent trends of activity are not always indicative of persistent motivation—

[1] Misselbrook, B. D. "The Short Personnel Selection Interview". *Occupational Psychology* 1946, XX, pp. 85–97.

[2] Heim, A. W: "The Interview". *Medical Research Council Applied Psychology Unit Report*, No. 8, 1944. (This report is unpublished, and has been circulated in duplicated form only.)

they sometimes denote only lifeless evasion of environmental novelty. Wilson's five last headings are *Personal Attitudes*, *Competitiveness*, *Energy*, *Persistence* aud *Technical Prowess*. He has a number of interesting and helpful things to say about each.

§ 3

How to conduct the Interview

Hints concerning the actual conduct of the interview are to be found in all the papers referred to in this chapter. Each author expresses the points that seem to him salient in the particular kind of interviewing he is concerned with, but taken together it cannot be said that anything very novel emerges.

Misselbrook,[1] speaking of interviews for the selection of candidates for technical work, emphasises the value of including a practical test within the interview itself. This not only allows observation of the candidate in concrete circumstances, but often assists in overcoming shyness. The same author points out that such interviews must often also serve to inform candidates about the kind of work they will be called upon to do if selected. Often a choice between different possible jobs must be made by the candidate and/or interviewer. This giving of information, Misselbrook suggests, can be turned to great advantage in the conduct of the interview itself. It provides an excellent topic of conversation, and plenty of opportunity for evoking genuine attitudes from the candidate, for it is a question of real interest to him. Attitudes are often more readily displayed in relation to future hypothetical possibilities than they are to past actual experience, which may be tinged with a sense of frustration

[1] loc. cit.

or of partial failure. Buzzard[1] notes the importance of providing interviewers with adequate clear information regarding the nature of different types of technical job. He found that information available often quite incomplete and unhelpful.

Regarding the conduct of the Board Interview, Buzzard[2] had occasion to notice, in one somewhat specialised type, certain shortcomings which might perhaps also be found elsewhere. Once noted, their elimination was a relatively simple matter. The first was that adequate information about the candidates was not always available, or, if at hand, had to be foraged for in a mass of disarranged documents. This, somewhat naturally, exercised a detrimental effect upon the smooth conduct of the interview. Secondly he found the formality of the board often a bar to the successful establishment of *rapport*. Thirdly " . . . misunderstandings were common both of the candidate by the board and *vice versa*. These seemed largely due to the candidate's difficulty in addressing more than one person at a time, because members would interrupt one another, and, generally, because no *rapport* was satisfactorily established." Such misunderstandings sometimes actually produced arguments between board and candidate. Again, the board, assuming the candidate to possess much greater verbal dexterity than he in fact did, tended to rely in its judgments on the surface value of answers to straight questions. This led to much misapprehension, and interviews tended to be conducted on one aspect of a case only. The particular purpose for which these boards

[1] Buzzard, R. B: "Aircrew Allocation Centre, Brackla. A Selection Unit for Tour-expired Aircrew". *Flying Personnel Research Committee Report* 1944, No. 604. (Unpublished Report circulated in duplicated form only.)

[2] Buzzard, R. B: "Interview Boards, Investigation of Procedure". *Flying Personnel Research Committee Report.* 1944. No. 580. (Unpublished. Issued in duplicated form only.)

were used, and the circumstances of their constitution were probably in part responsible for the emergence of this particular set of faults, but Buzzard's observations demonstrate the paramount value of careful attention to the organisation of Board procedure.

§ 4

The Use, and proper Inter-relation of, Multiple Interviews

In studying the procedure employed in re-allocating tour-expired Air Crew to other duties, Buzzard[1] was led to devise a system in which interviews by single members of the board were co-ordinated with the board interview itself. By this means he obtained a considerable improvement in the results. With variations in individual cases, the procedure consisted of:—

(1) Preliminary interview by one member of the board.

(2) Psychological Tests as required.

(3) "Consultant" interviews with Medical, Educational and Technical specialists.

(4) Second interview with the member of the board who conducted (1).

(5) Board Interview.

Buzzard and the interviewers who carried out this procedure found that the two, separated, private interviews with a single member of the board offered a considerable advance in effectiveness over one. In the first place, *rapport* was more completely established. Secondly, it is possible to

[1] loc. cit.

determine what specialist advice is needed and to obtain this before the final assessment. Chiefly, however, the splitting of the single interview is important because the situation raises for the candidate problems which are novel in the specific form in which the interviewer presents them, and a lapse of time is required for him to think these over. He is given information about the choice of work available to him, and his views must be allowed to settle and crystallise before it is possible reliably to determine his attitudes. In the same way the interviewer benefits from the opportunity for reflection.

The principal reasons for adding single interviews to the board were:—(1) the unsuitability of the board interview situation in itself for dealing with some essential aspects of the candidate, (2) the economy of effort and time at the actual board interview produced by the orderly presentation of the essentials of the candidate's case by the member who conducted the single interviews. It might be asked whether, when these conditions are satisfied, there is any necessity to retain the board itself. Buzzard found an *informally* conducted board valuable in itself in provoking the display of attitudes and by providing the occasion favourable to final judgment. In the simpler cases procedure could be reduced to a purely formal level.

This work of Buzzard's clearly provides a framework for general consideration of the means of improving the technique of board interviewing, and suggests a number of lines of potentially fruitful enquiry regarding its use for specific purposes. This increasing tendency to organise the component parts of vocational selection and guidance procedures into coherent wholes may also be noted in the development of such enterprises as War Office Selection Boards, and Civil Service Selection Boards.

§ 5

Necessity for, and Methods of, training Interviewers

During the war large numbers of people became interviewers not primarily because of their interviewing experience or capacity, or because they were judged innately suited to such a task, but because they possessed the necessary service or technical background. (Often, indeed, the sequence of events leading to the interviewer's desk was strictly inscrutable.) There was, therefore, much scope for attempts to improve interviewing results by training interviewers, though so far as I am aware little was done in a formal sense beyond the provision of hints in note or lecture form. Heim's contribution[1] is representative of what can be done in this direction. Shortage of time and opportunity was probably the main factor in preventing development of more protracted training methods.

Buzzard[2] has drawn attention to the desirability of attempting more formal training, and suggests in broad outline some of the methods which might be used. While his proposals consist chiefly in setting up a system of carefully supervised, though not lengthy, apprenticeship, he is concerned to emphasise the importance of teaching underlying principles, and instilling the right approach to the work, rather than the details of specific techniques. He tentatively suggests that a course for prospective interviewers should consist of three parts. In the first, preliminary, section the students should be given a short introduction to essential principles and outlines of practice before proceeding to practical work under supervision at a centre actually engaged in carrying out the guidance, selection, allocation

[1] loc. cit.

[2] loc. cit.

or other personnel work the student is expected to master, Here 'sitting-in', and later, actual practice under supervision, should be supplemented by informal and stimulating discussion. Thirdly, having mastered the elements of practice the student will be ready for a final more advanced course in which the implications and theoretical aspects can be dealt with in lectures and discussions.

As an interim measure, Buzzard found the careful design of the report form used by his interviewers to be of great value in training. This form did not consist of a rigid set of questions to be answered, but effectively covered the required ground. The constant necessity for obtaining from each candidate the material facts necessary for filling it in was very effective in promoting orderly and economical procedure, and in building the interviewer's skill, and improving his judgment.

The benefits to be expected from a determined effort to provide adequate training for interviewers are not limited narrowly to the immediate object in view. There is little doubt that concurrently with the effort to improve training methods there would grow up in the minds of those concerned clearer formulation of the underlying psychological problems, and useful attempts would doubtless be made to solve them. Training and research should go hand in hand.

§ 6

Conclusion

It will be seen that the past five years have contributed little to our understanding of the basic psychological processes of the interview. It was hardly to be expected that they should. But the necessities of war have afforded a spur

to empirical investigation which should bear fruit not only in improved practice but also in fundamental problems revealed—and revealed in a form demanding eventual attempt at solution.

Some of the psychological questions relevant to the success and reliability of the interview, which may also be studied in more limited contexts, have been surveyed by Dr. J. M. Blackburn in a recent paper.[1] He considers problems such as those of the judgment of personal qualities from photographs and cinema films; the qualities that go to make a good judge of character, and the various ways in which bias and prejudice in the interviewer may react upon the performance of his task. On the basis of work already done along these lines, Blackburn is able to make suggestions worthy of the attention of all interviewers. The further investigation of such questions, wisely blended with the study of the interview itself, offers one means by which one man's judgment of another might be placed if not on a surer, at least on a more communicable, foundation.

[1] Blackburn, J. M.: "The Psychology of the Interview." *Sociological Review.* 1941. 33, pp. 154–168.

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PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN BY
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